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September

MYSTERY STORIES

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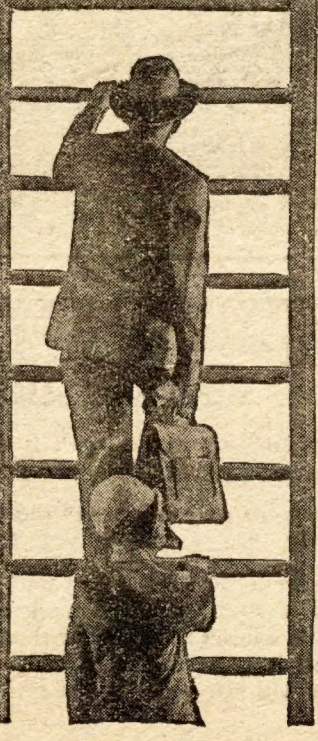

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Volume XI Number 6

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Around the Corner

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MYSTERY STORIES has only one reason for being—to please you. The only way of discovering whether we are living up to this ideal is by having you tell us what you like or do not like about the things we print.

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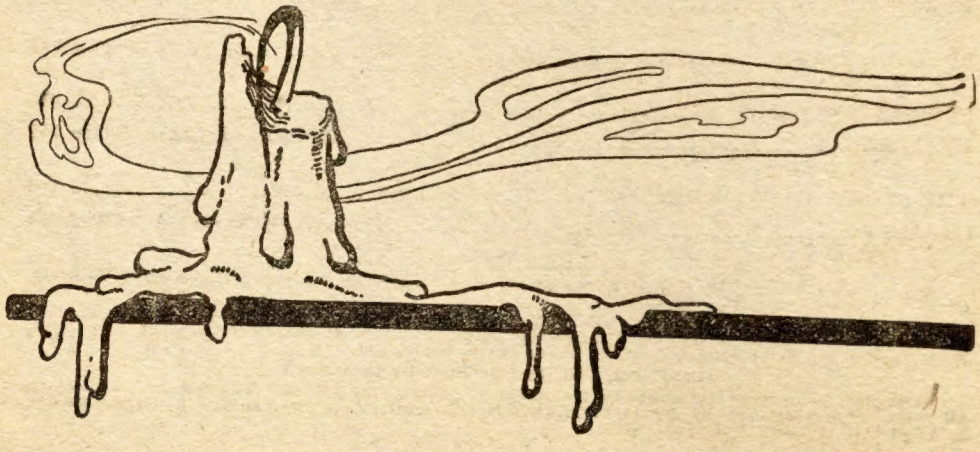
To come directly to the point—what we want you to do is to write us, telling us all the good and bad points you have found in the publication. Such criticisms will be carefully read, and whenever we possibly can do so changes will be made to make the magazine satisfy the largest number of people.

THE EDITOR.



By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

A MILLIONAIRE DISAPPEARS

SOMEONE rapped sharply upon the door of the commander's quarters of the Imperial liner *Gloucester*.

Captain John Baffin, with a brisk comment, raised his handsome old white head and put his feet back on the floor.

"There you are, Chris; somebody wants the captain to play shuffleboard or answer a few questions," he growled, with a humorous glance at his younger companion. "There's no sublime dignity of command left on the sea. A master's no more than a bus conductor.

"Come in!"

Despite his intimacy with the captain, Chris Trenmore wore the white uniform and single gold stripe, white-faced, that marked him an assistant purser.

He rose from the easy-chair in which he had been ensconced and faced his superior, straight as if he stood at attention to receive orders. The commander's reputation for discipline must not suffer because he chose to have a game with a man whose father had once saved his ticket.

The door swung open upon Clintock, the purser, one of the veterans of the line. Habitually his shoulders were bowed, as though the weight of his position was too much for his backbone. In this he was in startling contrast to the upright master of the *Gloucester*.

Just now, Clintock's manner was slightly apologetic. When his shifting eyes lighted upon Trenmore they expressed timid disapproval of his junior's presence. But as he turned back to the captain he quite forgot the assistant purser.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, captain, but I have something queer to report. It may not be anything, but——"

"Go on, Clintock," Captain Baffin encouraged.

"Smith, that secretary of Mr. Raulson's, just stopped at the inquiry office and asked me, quite casually, if I had seen his employer this morning. I said I hadn't. He looked at me with those—those furtive eyes of his, and then went out on deck. I wouldn't have thought anything of it except that the chief steward, who was standing beside me, remarked that Mr. Raulson hadn't been down to breakfast and Smith had asked him that same question in the saloon. Now, if——"

"I see," said the captain. "You think it's queer that a passenger of such size and importance as Mr. Raulson could disappear from sight for several hours on a mere fifteen thousand tonner like this."

The purser nodded deferentially.

"All right, Mr. Clintock. I'll have Trenmore, here, make a few discreet inquiries, since he's off duty at the moment."

"Thank you, sir," said Clintock, lingering near the door. "Of course it probably isn't anything——"

"No," said Captain Baffin decisively, "but we must find out, anyhow."

The old purser left the room.

"THERE'S a job for you, Chris," the *Gloucester's* commander said with a chuckle, turning to the man in the assistant purser's uniform. "See what the missing multimillionaire's up to. My guess is that he's in some friend's stateroom taking his gold teeth and other oddments away from him."

"Is Raulson a multimillionaire?" Trenmore asked thoughtfully, as he prepared to depart.

"He is today and he isn't tomorrow, or vice versa," replied the commander. "If, instead of wandering around the world looking for excitement, you stayed near the New York stock market, which is excitement's headquarters, you wouldn't have to ask me that. Furthermore, you wouldn't be deadheading your way to England in an ill-fitting suit of whites as a sub-purser and hehostess."

Trenmore smiled cheerily at this emphatic criticism.

"I might not even have the whites, from what I hear of the stock market," he answered. "But while I possess friends in high places, such as the bridge of the *Gloucester*, I don't need money. And if you don't think I'm earning my passage just watch me keeping the passengers entertain——"

Baffin held up his hand. "It's all right, my boy, you're a credit to the line," he said hastily. "They wanted somebody to brighten things up on board and you're certainly doing it. I'm glad I got you for the job."

Chris groaned. He found his duties onerous. "Tell me something about this Raulson," he requested. "You pointed him out on sailing day, a big, hearty, full-blooded chap, not more than forty, I should say, but your only comment was that he was the most successful gambler in the world."

"That describes him accurately enough," said Captain Baffin, "if you add that he's as grasping as a patent anchor and respected for his bite, like the cogs of a winch. Jasper Raulson is neither a broker nor a banker, but what they call an operator."

The commander paused, and then proceeded slowly, as if picking his way up a fog-shrouded channel. "Now, I'm not so sea-going and green but that I know that most Wall Street operators are honest enough. I've met quite a few on this ship. But this chap Raulson has thrown his scruples overboard. In fact, there was an ugly rumor floating around a year ago that an ex-partner of his, a fellow named

Folwell, had died in a most peculiar way in a motoring accident in which neither Raulson nor this understrapper of his, Smith, were more than scratched."

"That's genius, if they did it," Chris commented thoughtfully. "It would be impossible to convict them."

"Probably the thing is mere gossip, arising from the fact that Raulson inherited Folwell's money," Captain Baffin went on. "Of course that hail-fellow-well-met type sometimes has a secret personality as foul as the dregs of Hades concealed beneath the cloak of good-fellowship. But anyhow, since then he's been more aggressive than ever. He plays with companies as a crooked owner plays with his horses.

"Chris, that chap makes a big industrial concern or breaks it, as the race-track man wins races or throws 'em—for profit. He controls a string of companies, moves their stock up or down about as he feels like, and rakes in all the bets on the table."

"Interesting," murmured Trenmore. "And what if some other operator——"

Captain Baffin laughed. "They don't come his size," he explained. "There were some stories in the papers the day we left New York, Friday, that a clique was giving him a bit of trouble. Do you remember that gang of reporters who came on board to see him? The wireless news brought us back a couple of remarks he made, something about his enemies having to wreck the United States if they wanted to ruin him, for his money was all in the soundest concerns. He's so big he was just laughing at them."

Trenmore nodded, and put a hand on the doorknob.

"Well, I'll dig him up," he promised. "But——"

He stopped and stared at the door, as someone on the other side beat a rapid tattoo upon it.

"Come in!" said Captain Baffin.

The passenger who slowly opened the door and slipped in was a dapper, almost foppishly dressed little man, but his deeply-lined, dead-white face instantly destroyed the impression of fatuity created by his clothes. That unprepossessing countenance, with its deep-set black eyes, uncannily evasive, belonged to no fool, not even if its owner had worn cap and bells.

"What is it, Mr. Smith?" inquired the comander of the *Gloucester*.

The confidential secretary of Jasper V. Raulson did not speak at once. His eyes flitted from the brass buttons on the broad chest of Captain Baffin to the neighborhood of Chris Trenmore, and then back and up to the captain's face for an instant.

"This is Mr. Trenmore," said Captain Baffin, almost impatiently, as Smith made ready to speak. "I was about to send him to look for Mr. Raulson. Have you come to me about that?"

Smith nodded emphatically, and suddenly thrust into the commander's hands a sheet of the ship's note paper.

"The room steward found that on the washstand in Mr. Raulson's room," he said hoarsely. "It was in an envelope addressed to me."

Captain Baffin took the paper, read a line or two, and stopped abruptly to beckon to Chris Trenmore. "Read this," he said curtly. The younger man stood beside him, gazing intently at the penciled scrawl.

"I cannot face this any longer," the note began, without salutation. "They have got me at last, Smith, broke me, driven down the stock of my undertakings until there is nothing left for me but bankruptcy.

Damn their smirking faces, they'll never put me through that—not while there's an ocean left to die in."

Beneath, shaky and almost illegible, was the signature of Jasper Raulson.

Captain Baffin turned quickly to Trenmore.

"Rouse out the steward on duty at the indicator board on the shade deck last night," he said crisply. "Ask him if he saw anything of Raulson in the corridors. Question the room steward, the stewardess, and the men of the morning watches. I'll see the deck officers. Don't let it leak out to the passengers yet, if you can help it. This may not mean suicide; he may be drunk or crazy, but still on the ship."

"Yes, sir," said Trenmore, and bolted from the room.

As he hastened aft he felt a surge of excitement that his duties as assistant purser had failed to supply. To a young man who has explored the upper reaches of the Amazon in a flying boat, gone broke in a Canadian oil rush, and been on the beach in Samoa, all within a year, his present job of counselor and entertainer of ocean tourists lacked thrill.

But since the Atlantic and a flat purse were between him and an opportunity to handle a friend's thirty-footer in a yacht race from Falmouth to Naples, he had seized the only sea-crossing position in sight.

Now a passenger of dubious morals and exploded wealth had perhaps furnished a little action by failing to stand the gaff of adversity. Why that should thrill him particularly he did not know, but nevertheless he was conscious of a deep interest in Mr. Raulson, and an even deeper interest in his peculiar and unattractive employee, the unobtrusive Mr. Smith of the paper-white face and uneasy eyes.

ON the boat deck Chris Trenmore ran into the old purser. Clintock, tremendously excited, was hurrying forward, a dinner coat folded under his arm. He stopped his subordinate, looked about cautiously for passengers, and then whispered:

"Raulson's coat! Just turned in by a sailor. He found it aft—by the taffrail!"

Chris nodded thoughtfully. "He probably took the jump, then, poor devil," he said. "I'm going below to find out when he was last seen."

In his investigation Chris drew blanks, save for a statement by a man of the watch that he had seen a tall passenger roaming the decks restlessly some time after midnight, when passengers were supposed to below.

Then, in the messroom of the junior officers, who were denied the privilege of the main saloon, he ran into MacDonar, the talkative fourth engineer.

"Aye," said MacDonar, when Chris questioned him. "I saw your man, a big, barrel-chested fellow, with a quick step. Wore evenin' clothes. 'Tis a fool thing to resk the night air on deck after a watch in that hothouse doon there, but I came up for a pull at the pipe when relieved at midnight. I was standin' by the winches, aft, when he passed within three feet o' me, never lookin' at me, as is the way o' passengers toward dirty engineers."

"Did you see him go toward the stern?"

"Back an' forth he went, several times, and never raised his head off his chest. An' finally——" The engineer hesitated.

"What?" demanded Chris.

"He went behind the after deck house. And I, watchin' him, saw a sort of a shadow—on the starboard

side, the other side from the man—go flick an' away! Bein' a brave man, I went toward it, an' 'twas nothin'. An' then, bein' likewise a cautious man, I went below, for when pure air an' good tobacco make ye see movin' things on deck, 'tis time to get some sleep."

"A moving shadow went flick and away," Trenmore repeated in considerable perplexity.

"A movin' something," MacDonar amended. "It moved. Or a speck in my eye, let's call it."

"And which way did the—speck—move?"

"Aft!" replied the engineer. "Aft, like this Raulson. An' as I left the deck I remember thinkin' that ghosts was no concern of the engineers, an' about the only thing they aren't responsible for on the ship."

MacDonar had much more to say, but no more to tell. His talk veered to the ancient feud between deck and black gang, so Chris left him.

Moodily he made his way back to the deck and walked aft. He stood leaning over the taffrail and gazing down at the white, hissing water, with its shifting shades of green, as it twisted and swirled upward from the lash of the *Gloucester's* three screws.

"Maybe he jumped and maybe he was pushed," he muttered. "This rail is lower than I've seen it in some boats. It wouldn't take too much strength to grab a man's legs as he stood here, leaning on his elbows on the rail with his head over the side, and quickly heave him over."

So strongly did the thought appeal to his imagination that he drew back, instinctively, and glanced around warily. But there was no one behind the after deck house, the blank wall of which screened him from view of all others on board.

"I'm forgetting that note he left," he murmured. "And the coat—he'd hardly take off his coat to oblige a murderer."

He glanced at the rail, measuring its height above the deck. On the broad, curving surface of the top he noticed a scratch in the new varnish. The mark extended from the inner side of the wooden rail to the outer.

With a frown of consideration Chris examined it closely. The mark was deep enough to have been made by some fairly sharp-pointed instrument applied with considerable pressure. It ended gradually, ceasin at the point where the rail rounded over to curve under.

"That might have been made by the clip of a man's fountain pen or an ornament on his watch chain," Chris decided, with sudden interest. "A man with his chest against the rail leaning further and further over—no; a man couldn't pull himself over far enough to make that scratch, unless he was an athlete. And he wouldn't, anyway. There are easier ways of going over that rail.

"But somebody gripping his legs, raising them, and pushing him over would force his chest against the rail hard enough to cut that mark."

He considered this soberly. Certainly if this scratch had been made recently and had something to do with Raulson's disappearance it complicated the matter.

CHRIS TRENMORE turned and walked forward, nursing a new idea. Near the battery of winches and donkey engines by the after hatch, he found the men of the watch on deck busy painting the mast and cargo derricks.

Chris stopped. "When was that taffrail scraped and varnished?" he inquired of the bo'sun, nodding aft.

"Varnished yesterday afternoon, sir," the petty officer replied, somewhat startled by the abrupt question from a purser. "We 'ad it roped

off until this morning." He drew nearer; his voice became low and confidential. "One o' the watch found a coat 'angin' on the rope and turned it over to the purser. Was that what you——"

"No," said Chris. "It's all right, bo'sun, I just wondered when it was done."

He passed on. "Must report this to Captain Baffin," he decided. "I can't fit it all in, somehow, but he ought to be told about it. Maybe there's a detective on board who could make something out of it."

The commander was in the weather wing of the bridge. He was staring forward with an absorption that the empty horizon and smooth sea did not justify. On the lee side of the bridge the second officer paced with the slow steps of dull routine.

Captain Baffin beckoned Chris to come to him, as soon as he saw him.

"What have you found out?" he inquired eagerly.

Chris reported swiftly, making no comment upon the conflicting evidence his investigation had revealed, but outlining it all. When he finished, Captain Baffin gazed at him with keen blue eyes for twenty seconds; then looked seaward again.

"In the course of your peculiar and highly unspecialized career have you ever been connected with the police, Chris?" he asked.

Chris reflected; then nodded. "I was sworn in as a deputy sheriff down in New Mexico once when a poor devil who'd slugged the sheriff's brother in a fight broke jail."

"What did you do?" the captain demanded.

"I rode fifty-eight miles on a horse in the wrong direction," Chris replied, with a reminiscent grin.

"Excellent!" exclaimed John Baffin. "That was a display of brainwork that eminently qualifies you for this mission. I hereby relieve you of your duties as marine entertainer and assign you to the investigation of this disappearance."

Chris Trenmore looked up to see if the commander of the *Gloucester* was in earnest beneath his light tone. One glance at the captain's grim face, suddenly autocratic and reserved, convinced him that he was.

"If there's been murder on my ship I want to know it, Chris," he said emphatically. "And I want to know who did it, too. You're the only man on board who is available for such a delicate job. Find out how that scratch on the taffrail came there. Find out what it was that MacDonar saw go 'flick and away,' as he calls it. You have full authority. Go ahead!"

Chris Trenmore left the bridge. He sensed beneath Captain Baffin's curt tone how deeply the old seaman felt the stigma of such a thing as suicide, or, even worse, murder, on the vessel that he commanded. He, too, would like to get to the bottom of the thing, but he doubted his own ability in the rôle of detective. Action had always been his line.

"MacDonar was right," he grumbled. "The captain says, 'Go ahead,' but it's the engine-room that furnishes the steam, and it's me that must furnish the brains in this thing. Where'll I get 'em?"

He considered. "I'll have to snoop around and bluff through it somehow," he thought. "But I wish I knew how in hades a detective got started on a thing like this. Certainly a man like Raulson, who's been suspected of murder and who's probably wrecked dozens in Wall Street, has lots of enemies."

He ambled to his room and sat down on his berth, head in hands, staring at the carpet and wondering how to begin. And while he sat there, the vision of Smith, Raulson's secretary, an elegant, unobtrusive

little figure in a striped gray suit, with that incongruous white, wrinkled face, rose before him. It would not down.

Did Smith know anything about that sudden blotting out of his chief? Was it good detective work to question him, or to keep away from him? Chris did not know, but somehow he felt no desire to interrogate the confidential secretary.

CHAPTER II

LENDING A HAND

THAT night, after a day of inaction and unhelpful cogitation, Chris Trenmore sat at a table in the purser's private office examining a plan of the ship, and especially the part of the shade deck admidships where the staterooms of Jasper V. Raulson and of Smith were located. Clintock, his superior, studied the plan with him.

Both rooms were large and commodious; they were, in fact, among the half dozen best on the ship. They were not communicating, however. A corridor, cutting from the longitudinal passageway to the deck outside, stretched between them.

But though Raulson's stateroom did not open directly upon his secretary's, the financier's room was connected with another large room further forward. Clintock had explained to Chris that although Smith had applied for adjoining staterooms at the New York office, the line had been unable to furnish them.

"There's an old man, very tottery, in 206, that connects with Raulson's, which is 207," Clintock explained. "The office tried to get him to take 208, which is Smith's. It's exactly the same type. But he refused, on the ground that it would be further from the bath. The old boy—his name is Grundle—is either crotchety or too feeble to walk far. There's a nurse with him."

"I think I've seen him on deck once or twice, with a hard-visaged woman with a cap," Chris said thoughtfully. "He gets along extremely slowly with a stick."

"That's the man," Clintock agreed.

"Well, Mr. Grundle's temper or his disability comes in handy," Chris remarked briskly. "I suppose you can give me the key that unlocks the door between his room and Raulson's?"

Clintock hesitated, for interference with passengers was a violation of purser's ethics, but he knew Captain Baffin's orders. He took the key from the board and handed it over with a knowing look at the amateur sleuth.

"You don't want Smith to know you're going into Raulson's room," he charged.

"You've guessed my secret," Chris admitted. "Never let anyone know anything. If that isn't a maxim of the detective business, it should be. Smith has the keys of both rooms, hasn't he?"

"Yes," Clintock replied. "But why not get the room steward to open Raulson's door for you instead of disturbing old Grundle?"

Chris shook his head. "What I want is two exits," he said. "I may want to emerge rapidly and clandestinely."

With the thought of a clear, safe exit still in his mind Chris left Clintock's office and in an unobtrusive way strolled through certain of the corridors giving a view into the public rooms of the ship.

Although the *Gloucester* was buzzing with the news of Raulson's disappearance, Chris was relieved to note that none of his acquaintances among the passengers gave any indication that his own connection with the investigation was known. So, with the same generalities that the other ship's officers employed, he

evaded the eager questions put to him.

"Yes, Mr. Raulson had fallen, or possibly leaped overboard. It was too bad. The captain had all the facts in the matter and he was not making anything public until he could report to the proper authorities on arrival at Southampton."

In the course of his stroll Chris succeeded in his objective. He located Mr. Smith, in a faultless dinner jacket, seated at a table in the forward lounge, deeply engaged upon a pile of letters, radio messages and other papers.

As there was a dance on the sheltered side of the promenade deck that night Smith had the room entirely to himself. He was at a corner table, with his back to the door, and he seemed thoroughly busy and unapproachable.

But interviewing Mr. Smith of the evasive eyes was still the last thing in Chris Trenmore's mind. The captain had done that without obtaining another fact of value in clearing the mystery.

After one glance into the room Chris hurried down to the shade deck, just below the promenade, and along the corridor to the indicator board where, as he had ascertained at the purser's office Bartlett was stationed, the steward who looked after the staterooms of Raulston, Smith, and the feeble old man, Grundle.

"Bartlett, how good are you at coughing?" Chris inquired briskly.

Bartlett eyed him with an inexpressive countenance. "I can cough my bit, sir, when required," he answered woodenly.

"Good," said Chris. "I want you to stand here in the corridor and keep a sharp eye, fore and aft. If you see Mr. Smith coming along before I return, cough! Cough loudly, but not too long. And if you hear the door open that leads from the deck in the corridor of staterooms 207-208, cough!"

"I understand, sir," said Bartlett.

Chris walked immediately to 206 and knocked imperatively. There was no answer for a moment. Then the startled voice of a woman inquired:

"Who's there?"

"An officer of the ship," Chris replied in a low voice. "I would like to speak to Mr. Grundle, please."

"You can't," the nurse answered without opening the door. "He isn't here; he's taking a hot bath."

"Will you please open the door," Chris said curtly. "I must speak to you."

The woman grumbled under her breath and moved heavily about, and Chris was compelled to repeat his request.

"I must ask you to permit me to enter the other stateroom through this connecting door," he announced formally.

"Well, for—for goodness sakes!" said the nurse, staring at him. She was a woman of forty with a firm and rather a grim visage, hardly the kind of nurse that Chris himself would choose to go through an illness.

He stepped briskly into the stateroom, as if she had given her consent, and slipped the key into the lock of the other door.

"Mr. Grundle will raise trouble about this," the woman said tartly. "It's bad enough to have a room next to a passenger who's committed suicide without having pursers traipsing in all hours. You'd better be quick, young man. He'll be back from his bath soon."

Chris did not answer. He entered Raulson's room, closing the door behind him, and looked swiftly about. From the look of things Smith had done little as yet to get together

Raulson's effects. His clothes still hung in the wardrobe, save for the evening clothes he had been wearing. Captain Baffin had kept the coat; how many miles astern the rest of the suit was Chris did not know.

But he had not come to examine Raulson's clothes, particularly. What he wanted was a specimen of the dead man's writing to compare with the writing in the suicide note. And he also wanted to get hold of something written by Smith.

HIS MISSION was not as easy as he had thought it would be. Raulson, he knew, had a brief case, but Chris' first quick search revealed that it was not in the room. Undoubtedly, he reflected, Smith had it with him upstairs.

There was nothing suspicious about that, for Smith, as the faithful secretary, would, of course, be tremendously busy straightening out Raulson's affairs. If he had murdered Raulson for some secret motive, he would undoubtedly be much more likely to keep it. But that fact, of course, was not evidence. And evidence was what Chris wanted.

He stood in the middle of the stateroom and cursed himself for a fool. True, he had succeeded in bullying a woman into letting him enter this room, but now that he was here it did him little good. As a detective he was a colossal failure.

"I've got to bluff it through somehow," he muttered, desperately surveying the made bed, the undisturbed couch, the washstand, the wardrobe, and the easy-chair. There was no trunk in the room, for Raulson had been traveling light. The two suitcases under the bed were empty.

"What would a detective do next?" he speculated. "Go through those clothes for clues, I suppose. Perhaps I should have tried Smith's room first. I'm more likely to find a specimen of Raulson's writing there than in this room."

He moved toward the door, half decided to call Bartlett, in the corridor, and have him open Smith's room. But he halted. He remembered having read somewhere of detectives who made microscopic examinations of rooms, with astonishing results.

"I'll finish this first," he decided. Going to the wardrobe, he took down one of the business suits that hung there and went through the pockets with painstaking care. They were empty. The other suit yielded no greater results.

He rummaged around among the shirts, socks, and underwear in the drawers below. He examined two pairs of shoes attentively. But they were just ordinary shoes, without the vestige of a clue about them. The aroma of mystery was missing.

Finally he took out the drawers and peered into the aperture behind them. No result. He crept around the room on his hands and knees, but still nothing having the slightest connection with Raulson's disappearance presented itself to his harassed mind.

Perfunctorily he patted the bed and shook the cushions of the easy-chair, though what he hoped to discover there he could not guess. As he tried the couch his fingers encountered something hard beneath the covering, where it touched the wall. Methodically he pulled the cloth aside and found a small bottle which had been tucked beneath, between wall and couch.

Chris picked it up, suddenly excited, although he had no reason to believe that this bottle could have anything to do with Raulson's death. It was three-quarters full of a white, crystalline powder.

"I wonder what that stuff is," he murmured. "I'll take it along and ask the doctor about it. It's all I have to show for my investigations."

He slipped it into his pocket and left the stateroom through the door leading to Grundle's room. The nurse met him with hostile eyes.

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you," Chris apologized. "It would be well for you and Mr. Grundle to say nothing of this visit to other passengers, as Captain Baffin would regret being compelled to detain you both at Southampton, as witnesses. The less you appear to know about this, you see, the less likely are the investigators to trouble you."

The woman's anger was submerged in instant alarm. "I won't say nothin' to anybody," she promised. "Not even to Grundle, if you get out before he comes."

Chris left at once. "She won't talk," he murmured confidently. "As a snooper and bully I'm improving."

He swung into the corridor where Bartlett watched, and almost walked into Mr. Grundle himself. The thin old man, clad in a dressing gown, with his long white hair straggling more violently over his shoulders than usual, was making infinitesimal progress with the aid of his stick from the direction of the men's bathrooms. He glared suspiciously at Chris, but said nothing.

Chris passed him in silence. The old man could not know positively that he had just come from his room, although he had seen him in the passage outside his door.

TO ESCAPE encountering Smith, if he chanced to leave the lounge to return to his stateroom, Chris went swiftly down the next passage forward and out upon the deserted deck. He climbed the companionway to the promenade unobserved, and then went on up from the brilliantly lighted space, thronged with dancing passengers, to the darkness of the boat-deck.

He had not taken three steps along the black deck toward the captain's quarters under the bridge when a white light glared into his eyes. At the same time something swished by his head. As he staggered back, his eyes still blinded, a powerful hand seized him by the shoulder. Other hands closed around his ankles.

This was action, much more in Chris's line than deduction. He realized what that grip on the shoulder meant—that the man in the dark who had missed him once was measuring him for another blow with his weapon, whatever it was. He dodged instantly, and just in time.

With his fist tight-clenched he lashed out. The blow struck flesh, and Chris heard a muffled exclamation. Before he could strike again, the man who held his legs had succeeded in throwing him off balance. A weapon whistled overhead as he crumpled.

He fell, but let himself drop easily. As his shoulders thudded on the deck he kicked out heartily, freeing himself. With a shout, he rolled sideways, and leaped to his feet again. He was out of bondage, and the mystery was within striking distance.

"Lights! Murder! Lights!" he shouted, and his voice had a jubilant ring. He sprang in, guarding his head with his raised left hand, and swinging vigorously with his right.

Again he hit something, but this time he was struck in return. The other man had adopted his tactics, and had been swinging his weapon fiercely. The blow of Chris's fist had given him an approximate idea of the amateur sleuth's whereabouts. The force of the sweep thrust

Chris' guarding arm aside, and something thudded against his skull. It was a glancing, almost spent tap, but the tremendous power that had launched it had broken through his best defense.

His arms dropped to his sides and he faltered on his feet. The next instant the light, a flashlight, played on him again. Two pairs of groping hands found and seized him. He was half carried, half dragged, to the rail, between two lifeboats.

But though he was groggy, Chris was not out, and as he realized their purpose and the nearness of the ship's side he renewed the fight with another cry.

Though the struggle had lasted only seconds, he could hear the officer on the bridge shouting a command, and footsteps were coming toward them. If he could avoid another blow of that blackjack, or whatever it was, he still might keep both antagonists busy until they could be cornered.

He freed his feet as before, by lashing out vigorously, and heard the man who held them grunt at the impact of one heavy shoe.

"Shoot and run!" gasped the other assailant, shoving Chris from him toward the rail. Chris, bracing himself for a rush, heard the command and stopped abruptly. If it was gun play, here with the sea at his back and a lifeboat on either side, he was as helpless as a sheep in a fence corner. And it is not tactics to rush a man with a gun. It was time to go; the powerful leader himself was a match for him without weapons or aid.

Out of the darkness came a spurt of flame. Chris uttered a strangled cry and half fell, half climbed, over the railing, clinging tightly to the bars with his hands. He let his feet drop suddenly from the top of the rail and lowered his body swiftly. He hung suspended from the edge of the deck. If they turned that flash on again they would see his hands.

He waited in tense watchfulness, ready to take his chance overboard in the midnight sea rather than hang on and be shot. But no flash of light came. His legs, swinging free, bumped against a metal pillar that ran from promenade to boat-deck. He twined himself around it hastily, and pulled his head up again to the level of the boat-deck. Plainly he heard running feet—his assailants were getting away.

He slid down the post, alighting on the promenade not forty feet from the astonished dancers. He shot across the deck to the companionway he had ascended before, and ran up, alert to head off the fugitives. He yearned for a chance to meet the big man on even terms.

But the boat-deck had half a dozen exits to the deck below, and the men who had attacked Chris had taken one of the others. He found several officers, whose quarters were in the bridge-house, rushing about in the dark in an effort to find out what was wrong.

The boat-deck lights, used only in emergencies, since strong lights on the uncovered deck obscure the vision of officers on the bridge, were finally turned on.

CHAPTER III

THE VIAL

CHRIS, after a swift circle of the deck to search the lifeboats and odd crannies, reluctantly decided that the men had fled below. He started for the main stairway. There he encountered Captain Baffin.

"Trenmore, do you know anything about this hullabaloo?" demanded the commander of the *Gloucester*.

"A little, sir," Chris answered

grimly. "I was on the receiving end of that gun. I'll report to you in a moment, sir."

He dashed down the stairs and into the forward lounge. The inscrutable Smith was there, hunched over at his table, writing busily. His papers were still piled high in front of him.

Though Chris eyed him intently, he could see no signs of quick breathing on the part of the secretary, and his clothes seemed quite as immaculate as ever.

The room, as before, was deserted, save for an old lady who was sound asleep in an easy-chair. Obviously she could not tell him whether Smith had left the lounge for a few minutes.

At that moment a crowd of passengers who had been at the dance came boiling in, discussing the pistol shot volubly. Hoping they had not identified him as the officer who had slid down the post from deck to deck, Chris slipped out and plunged down to the inquiry office. Clintock was in his own office adjoining.

"Chief, will you do me a favor?" he requested hastily, and, taking the surprised officer's consent for granted, he went on, hastily:

"Go up to the lounge and sit there until Smith leaves. And when he gets up look him over carefully and see if there are any signs of rough usage about his clothes."

Before Clintock could assent Chris was on his way up the stairs again. He evaded questions on the way up by speed rather than by tact. Captain Baffin he found striding up and down his sitting-room in a very serious frame of mind.

"Well, sir," Chris reported, "I entered Raulson's room through the one occupied by Grundle, that old invalid, and searched for clues without much luck. I did dig up this." He laid on the table the bottle he had found under the couch cover.

"On my way up to your quarters two men jumped me. They made very strenuous efforts to put me over the side, and finally risked firing a shot at me when they heard help coming. One of them's a terror, sir."

Baffin stopped in his walk and picked up the vial and stared at its white contents. Then he pressed a button. His boy appeared almost instantly.

"Ask Doctor Walters if he will please come up," the captain said, and as the servant disappeared he turned an angry red face to Chris Trenmore.

"Chris, this thing is getting serious," he said. "You're the man who is investigating what looks like an obvious suicide. And as soon as you take your first important step in the matter two men attempt to murder you. That makes it look more than ever as if Raulson had been killed. I've never had anything like this occur on a ship of mine before, and, by——"

He stopped, controlling his mounting wrath, and abruptly took a pipe from a rack on the wall. Putting it into his mouth, as if it were a stopper for his rage, he resumed his pacing.

"As far as I am concerned, it makes it interesting," said Chris. "I'm no detective, but if those two get within reach of my fist again I'll be pleased to continue the discussion. But I must admit they nearly ended the fight in the first round."

"Checked up on Smith?"

Chris nodded. "Trying to," he said. "He's just where I saw him earlier in the evening—in the lounge writing."

"I had the first officer go over the boat-deck," Captain Baffin said.

"He reported just before you came up that a quick survey shows no blood, no discarded weapon, nothing that would throw any light on the scuffle. He's continuing the search now."

Chris nodded. "They left in a hurry, but I was afraid they wouldn't leave any clues," he commented rather disgustedly. "Clues are scarce on this ship."

"Speaking of clues," said Captain Baffin, drawing from his pocket the note that had been found in Raulson's stateroom, "I've been going over this. I'm no handwriting expert, but there's something funny about it. I've been comparing this signature with the signature Raulson put on the decimal pool list in the smoke-room."

He put the suicide note on the table and brought his fist down on it with a thud of emphasis. "This thing is written by a man in a most agitated frame of mind, on the face of it. But the signature, though scrawled and almost illegible, has a —a certain trace of careful slowness about it, as if the writer was trying to make it look shaky. And it's shakier than the rest of the note. Why should it be when a man, no matter how he's feeling, writes his name more easily than he writes anything else?"

"You thought of that, too, then," Chris muttered, rather chagrined. "My principal reason for entering Raulson's room was to get hold of some of his writing."

"We'll adopt the murder theory," Captain Baffin announced decisively. "Two men can do a much better job of throwing a powerful fellow like Raulson overboard than one—the same two, we'll say, that tries to put you over. We're gunning for two men now, then, and one of them, we have reason to believe, may be Smith. That's reasonable so far. Who the other is, God knows."

"He got a good hard swing in the face; I can tell you that," Chris said grimly. "I suggest that we keep a good look-out for a gentleman with a black eye or a swollen nose or cheek."

"We will." Captain Baffin lit his pipe and took up his stride again. "You know, Chris, we're starting in the middle of this investigation instead of at the beginning. This crime was planned ashore somewhere, in Wall street, perhaps, for that's where Raulson did his dirty work and made his enemies. He wasn't much interested in the other causes of trouble—women, politics, whisky, and so on."

Chris nodded. "Putting this note aside as the work of his enemies," he said, "we still know that he was worried about something, even if it isn't the thing mentioned in this note. MacDonar saw him pacing up and down in no easy frame of mind. And I believe you said that a crowd of reporters came on board to see him about some fight in Wall street—some other operators attacking his stocks?"

Captain Baffin assented. Chris picked up the note and read the first part of it: "I cannot face this any longer. They have got me at last, Smith—blocked me—driven down the stock of my undertakings until there is nothing left for me but bankrputcy."

"Wouldn't that help the clique that was shooting at his stocks—the fact that he and, I suppose, his companies, were facing bankruptcy?" he suggested.

"It would," the captain replied. "Especially when he emphasized it by committing suicide—presumably. And Smith"—he eyed Chris meaningly—"sent off a report by radio to his brokers, so he said, soon after the coat was discovered aft. Rather

indecent haste to broadcast an employer's suicide and ruin, wasn't it?"

"This looks to me as if we had established a powerful motive for the crime," Chris said. "This gang, or one crooked operator perhaps, spreads rumors about Raulson's companies. Raulson, of course, denies them. But his secret enemy has bought up Smith, and put a thug on board, too, to do away with Raulson and make it look like suicide. Maybe Smith helps in the actual murder. And any rate, he shoots off the news to Wall Street as soon as possible."

"And Raulson's stock market foe, who had sold short bales of stock in his companies, makes a killing when the stocks tumble down," Captain Baffin finished. "That's a good theory. But what we've got to do, what you've got to do, in fact, is to get evidence against Smith and find out who the other fellow is. He may be a passenger; he may be a new member of the crew."

Chris nodded, though his face failed to indicate any hope of success. He looked ruefully at the skinned knuckles of his right hand.

"To think that I connected with the murderer's ugly phiz and never scored a knockout," he mourned. "I'll give him another chance to get me, I think, and this time I'll break my fist on him or bend a marlinspike over his head. You have marlinspikes on these God-forsaken steamers, I hope?"

A discreet tap on the door forestalled Captain Baffin in his reply. The caller was the ship's surgeon, Doctor Walters.

"Ah, doctor, what do you make of this?" demanded the captain, pouncing on the bottle of white powder and handing it to the medical man.

Doctor Walters, an elderly gentleman who lacked the aura of confidence which makes the fortune of many a physician, removed the stopper and shook a tiny quantity of the powder onto the palm of his hand, smelled it, and held it suspiciously to the light. Then he separated a few of the tiny crystals and gingerly put them to his tongue.

"In all probability heroin," he announced. "A derivative of morphine; a habit-forming narcotic. I can analyze it for you if you wish."

"Could Jasper Raulson have been a drug user?" Captain Baffin exclaimed. The idea obviously startled him.

Doctor Walters smiled dryly and shook his head. "Mr. Raulson was in appearance the exact antithesis of a victim of morphinism. He had a ruddy face, strong muscular body, and a general appearance of health and vitality."

Captain Baffin pondered, and tapped his pipe.

"May I add that his suicide is something of a medical curiosity?" the surgeon ventured. "That type of man is usually incurably optimistic. He doesn't give up easily and he is not always scrupulous concerning the way he fights, so intense is his determination to win."

"Um," muttered Captain Baffin, waving the doctor to a seat and taking the bottle from him. "We seem to have medical testimony to bolster up our theory of murder, Chris."

"How about Smith, his secretary?" asked the assistant purser. "Does he look like a drug user, doctor?"

The surgeon hesitated. "I have not observed him closely, but he impresses me as merely an ordinary example of chronic ill health, or rather lack of health, due to sedentary habits and city life," he reported. "This type of individual,

the product of modern high-speed nervous activity and low-speed physical life, is——"

"Thanks, doctor," the captain broke in. He glared resentfully at the bottle of heroin that had complicated matters so unexpectedly. "We may be compelled to enlist your help again in this matter."

Doctor Walters withdrew.

Captain Baffin stared at Chris Trenmore for a moment and then sought comfort in his pipe. "What do *you* make of that?" he inquired, nodding toward the bottle.

"Not much," confessed Chris. He got up and walked toward the door; then turned and faced his commander. "The point I want to settle is just why those two thugs, whoever they are, jumped me in the dark. Why attack me, at a terrible risk of discovery?"

"There's only one answer to that," said Captain Baffin. "They must have known that you had searched Raulson's room, and that you were coming up to me to report. They must have feared that you had discovered something in that room that would give them away, convict them of murder, perhaps. That's the only reason why they'd take such a chance—to get rid of you before you could blab to me."

Chris looked abashed. "They compliment me," he murmured disconsolately. "I wish I knew what they thought my detective skill had uncovered."

"We'll go down there, both of us, and have a look right now," Captain Baffin said, standing up purposefully. He thrust the bottle of heroin into his pocket. "Smith be damned; he knows by this time that we smell a rat."

Chris lingered beside the door. "How about issuing me a pistol and a flashlight, captain?" he asked. "I'd much rather drive my fist through this mysterious murderer's head, but I can't compete against bullets."

"You can have two, if you want them," the commander assured him and, turning back, he produced a big automatic and two spare clips of bullets. "Get a flashlight down at the barber's shop."

Chris slipped the weapon into his back pocket with a grunt of satisfaction. Its presence lent confidence in his ability to get to the bottom of the mystery.

TOGETHER they made their way across the dark boat-deck with eyes and ears alert, but no one disputed their course. As they passed the forward lounge, Chris put his head in the door. Smith had disappeared, and Clintock still feigned to be deep in a book. He came to them.

"Smith left about fifteen minutes ago," the purser reported. "His evening clothes appeared to me to be quite in order, but I noticed that he carried his papers in front of his white dress shirt, as if he might be hiding a mark or stain on it. Of course it might have been quite unintentional, but——"

"He's as wily as a snake!" Chris growled, disappointed at the failure of this promising lead.

All three men turned to descend the main stairway. But suddenly they paused, staring downward.

The sedate Doctor Walters, eyes popping in his head, was coming up, his short legs taking two steps at a time.

"Captain!" he gasped, with a quick look around to make sure no passenger was within hearing, "I've just chased a thief out of my surgery. He leaped through a window when he heard me coming."

"Great Lucifer!" Captain Baffin rumbled. "More of this! What a passage! Clintock, get a gun from your office and go to Raulson's

room. Stay there till we come. Detain anyone who tries to enter. Chris, we'll go down to the surgery. Lead on, doctor."

Together the commander and the two officers clattered down the stairs and walked swiftly to the doctor's office, forward on the awning deck.

They entered the surgery, which was lighted by a latticed window in the forward wall of the ship's superstructure. One glance at the medicine cabinet revealed the purpose of the thief, for the doctor's neat array of drugs now were scattered about by an impatient hand. One bottle lay on the floor, broken.

"As I came to the door of my stateroom I thought I heard a noise within the surgery," Doctor Walters explained, gazing ruefully at the mess the intruder had made. "I took the key from my pocket, and as I did so I heard this bottle drop. My hand shook. I thought the door was locked, but it was not. By the time I discovered this and rushed in he was gone, out that window. He must have opened it beforehand."

"Did he get anything, narcotic or poison?" Chris asked quickly. "Can you tell?"

"I could if a whole bottle were missing, after I've straightened things out," the doctor answered.

Captain Baffin had gone to the window and looked out onto the narrow, dimly-lit passageway that ran thwartship. Through this the thief had escaped.

"There's something below the window," he reported.

Chris squirmed through and dropped to the deck. The object Captain Baffin had seen was a bottle of white tabloids. It had been shattered by a fall to the deck. Chris picked up the bottle and some of its spilled contents and passed it through the window.

"What's that?" he asked. "The thief must have dropped it."

"My morphine sulphate!" exclaimed the doctor. "That's what he wanted, then. You know, captain, a habitual morphinist will do anything to get his drug."

"Well, this addict will have to come to me to get any more," Captain Baffin announced grimly. "Doctor, please turn over all your narcotics to the purser. Ask him to put them in the safe. Give him this, too."

He handed over the bottle of heroin that Chris had found in Raulson's room. They left the doctor and a steward cleaning up the débris, and made their way to Raulson's stateroom. They found the obedient elderly purser sitting on the edge of the couch, with his revolver leveled determinedly at the door.

"Nothing has happened, sir," he reported in a low voice, lowering his pistol with evident relief. "I believe I heard Smith go into his room just now, but he did not try to enter this one."

Captain Baffin shook his head in doubt. "We seem to be just about one jump behind the malefactors all the time," he commented. "I fear that whatever evidence was in this room at the time Trenmore searched it is now gone. They would hardly try murder to save their heroin, not with a supply on hand in an unguarded surgery. It was something else. However, I shall take no chance about this room.

"Chris, will you kindly hunt up the chief engineer and ask him for a machinist who can make a thoroughly good job of locking and sealing both these doors? In the meantime, Mr. Clintock, please continue your watch here until I send a steward to relieve you."

Chris departed on his errand and

soon returned with MacDonar, the fourth engineer, who combined a genius for mechanics with a loose tongue. The upholder of the honor of the engine-room set to work in business-like fashion, and soon had the doors padlocked and sealed so that no one could open them without making a great deal of noise.

"There," MacDonar said, stepping back at last to survey his work with satisfaction. "The chief himself couldn't get in there without sawin' through the door, an' he's a clever hand wi' the tools."

"It's a good piece of work," Chris agreed.

The door opposite Raulson's opened abruptly behind them.

Chris whirled around, his right hand snapping behind his back, toward the gun in his hip pocket. Smith stood in the doorway of his stateroom in a silk dressing-gown of vivid colors. His pallid face, scored deep with wrinkles, was obviously puzzled.

"May I ask what is going on out here?" he inquired in a level voice. "I am trying to go to sleep. It has been a hard day."

With an effort Chris controlled his feelings, restraining the repugnance he had felt for this man since the first moment he had seen him. It was not an emotion based upon anything logical; it was plain instinct that moved him. But Chris, in his varied career, had relied upon instinct more than once in tight places, and it had not deceived him.

"The captain's orders are that Mr. Raulson's stateroom be locked until our arrival at Southampton, sir," he replied shortly.

"I see," said Smith. He glanced at the locked door; then his eyes shifted swiftly from MacDonar to Chris, and slid along to his own slippered feet. "I have in my possession a brief case with letters, memorandums and various other documents relating to Mr. Raulson's business matters. Of course I have been doing what I can to straighten out his affairs, but they are decidedly involved—hopelessly involved—and as I have no legal authority it may be just as well to turn over everything to the captain. The muddle will have to be straightened out by the courts."

"Mr. Raulson was as badly off as that note indicated, then," Chris commented, endeavoring to make his tone casual. "I've heard of men who worried themselves into suicide without real cause."

Smith's thin lips twisted into a humorless and quickly repressed smile. "Raulson was in the hole for more than a million," he murmured confidentially. "Even I had no idea that things had gone so far until I got hold of all his memoranda."

His eyes came up for an instant to Chris Trenmore's face; then flickered away again. "Shall I give you the brief case now?" he asked.

"If you will," said Chris.

Smith opened the door of his stateroom wide, while he turned back to get the bag. "I have it all ready," he remarked, and handed it out to the assistant purser.

Chris, standing in the doorway, took the bag mechanically. His position had been such that he commanded a clear view of the room. He had seen Smith's dinner coat, waistcoat and trousers on a hanger suspended from a hook outside the door of the wardrobe. His patent leather shoes and silk socks lay on the floor beside the couch, his underwear, collar, black necktie and shirt studs lay on the couch. But there was no sign anywhere of the dress shirt that Smith had worn

that night, the dress shirt that Clintock had said the man had screened from view as he left the lounge.

Chris turned from the door with an automatic word of acknowledgment of Smith's smooth "Good night." Why wasn't that dress shirt in sight? Had Smith disposed of it because it had on its bosom the marks of Chris' kicking feet? The porthole presented an easy method of getting rid of it.

"Negative evidence," he muttered disconsolately, and hurried up to the bridge house to turn over the bag to Baffin.

But the captain was not on the bridge. Chris waited in his sitting-room until he returned.

"We're in for some heavy weather, Chris," the commander of the *Gloucester* said brusquely when he finally returned to his quarters and received the report of Smith's sudden friendliness. "I didn't like the looks of the sky this evening, too much yellow in the sunset, and the barometer is on its way down at a pretty brisk pace."

Chris nodded.

"I've got to push her along through almost anything as close to schedule as possible," Captain Baffin growled. "I'm turning in now to get some sleep. If there was anything in that bag that would help us our quiet friend Smith wouldn't have presented it to us. But keep it in the safe tonight and see what you can make of it in the morning. I'll take a hand if the weather's not too stiff."

Down in the modest quarters allotted to an assistant purser Chris Trenmore with a calculating grin tapped the thin panels of his door and shifted his pillow to the foot of the bunk. Then he stowed the automatic under his pillow and left the key in the lock inside the door. It had been, as Mr. Smith had remarked, a hard day, but Chris did not intend to permit it to be a harder night, if he could prevent it.

"Maybe I've thought some of the rust off my brain by this time," he mumbled, as he turned in. "This heroin-morphine mix-up will be something to consider in the morning. It might have been my finding that bottle that made them jump me. But how did they know I'd found it?"

With which puzzle he concerned himself in the few minutes before he drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

THE STOWAWAY ENTERS

THE *Gloucester* was taking white spray over the bow next morning, with every likelihood that the white spray would become green seas before evening.

The ship had developed a queer sort of shuddering buck through the smaller waves that convinced the more nervous passengers that she was going to pieces. But she rose sweetly enough over the larger combers.

Chris, awakening early, knew from the movement of the ship that he would work alone on the Raulson mystery that day. He groaned at the prospect of digging through the pile of papers in the brief case for a clue which he probably would not know when he found it.

At breakfast, however, the captain's boy brought him a damp, penciled scrawl, obviously written on the bridge.

"Chief engineer reports a stowaway found wandering on the upper engine-room gratings," it read. "Look him over. If you don't spot the man whose face you smashed among the passengers I'll turn out the crew for a fire drill after this

gale and you can inspect them all.

BAFFIN."

Chris finished his breakfast in a hurry. The bald brevity of the captain's note indicated that he attached little significance to the appearance of a stowaway, but Chris was ready to grasp at any straw.

Down in the engine-room he found the third engineer on watch at the bridge telegraph, and the chief roaming restlessly about his laboring engines.

"Aye, we have him, an' you're welcome to him," said the chief when Chris asked to see the stowaway. "The captain told me to keep him busy below, so I set the man to wheeling ashes in the stokehole, but precious little work there is in him. Three times already he's reported sick and he looks it. Take him out o' my sight."

In the stokehole Chris had no difficulty in picking out his man. He saw a tall, cadaverous fellow whose sparse hair was white and whose flesh had fallen in about his cheeks, temples and neck.

He was sitting on his wheelbarrow, and despite the terrific heat of the roaring furnaces he was shivering. Now and then his thin, wasted limbs twitched spasmodically. He was clad in undershirt and trousers that were of fairly good material.

"The man *is* sick," Chris commented. The stowaway saw him coming and sprang toward him.

"I must see the doctor!" he shouted, waving his arms threateningly. Chris nodded, and led the way without speaking up the iron ladders to an exit from the inferno of clashing steel.

As his companion was in no condition to be seen by passengers, Chris brought him through passageways in the crew's quarters to a door opening into the corridor forward, where Doctor Walters' surgery was located.

There he sent a steward to find the doctor. As he had suspected, Doctor Walters was having a busy morning reassuring sick passengers who thought they were dying. However, he was soon finished and returned to his surgery at once. Chris brought his gaunt captive to the doctor.

The physician looked at the stowaway keenly; then nodded significantly to Chris.

"What's your dose, my man?" he asked. "How long since you've had any?"

Chris stared at the captive again, noting his earthy color, his extreme thinness, and his rapidly rising excitement.

"Not a speck since last night, doctor!" the man exclaimed imploringly. "Not a speck! For God's sake——"

"Easy! Easy!" Doctor Walters soothed, pressing a button. "I'll get you some at once. Don't give way, man. Cocaine?"

"Heroin," mumbled the wreck of a man, dropping into a chair.

To the steward who answered his ring Doctor Walters gave orders to bring his slender stock of narcotics from the purser's safe, confirming the order by telephone to Clintock.

"Question him, doctor," Chris murmured. He saw that the unfortunate addict regarded Walters as his only salvation.

The physician gazed meditatively at the quaking man.

"Did you try to rob my surgery last night?" he asked quietly.

"I?" the stowaway exclaimed. He laughed wildly. "There was no need—last night."

"What is your name?"

"Sanders."

Chris, intent on this gaunt victim of a destroying habit, realized that

as a detective he had his man utterly in his power. By commanding the doctor to withhold the drug he could wring from him anything he desired. But would he not confess anything, tell any lie convicting himself and anyone else of Raulson's murder in his present pitiable state?

"I'm darned if I'll do it," he murmured. "The poor devil is about ready to collapse now. Besides, there isn't a mark on his face. And I'm ready to swear that the man that grappled with me last night had more meat on him than that poor scarecrow. I'm afraid this clue is just a false alarm."

Doctor Walters walked slowly over to the door of the surgery and beckoned to Chris. The amateur detective followed him into the corridor.

"This fellow is apt to go under," the physician said in a low voice. "I'm afraid to ask him anything else. Later, perhaps."

"He's a pretty bad case, isn't he?"

Doctor Walters nodded. "He's an addict of long standing. That's obvious. He'd die if I didn't give him some, tapering off his dose is the only way to save him."

"You know, I'm wondering whether he isn't telling the truth about robbing the surgery," Chris said thoughtfully. "Judging by his need for that stuff, he'd hardly drop it and run at the sound of a footstep, would he? I thought addicts would face any danger rather than be deprived of the stuff."

The ship's surgeon pondered.

"You may be right," he conceded. "By his present symptoms, I should judge that he had missed his morning dose, but had had some last night. And you may remember, he didn't deny he would rob the surgery—he said there was no need—last night. That sounds like truth. And it means he had a supply from another source. We're five days out. He couldn't have gone a fifth of that time without his heroin."

"The bottle in Raulson's room was half empty," Chris suggested, but there was no conviction in his voice.

"I'll know more about this chap when I find out how much and how often he needs a dose," said Doctor Walters. "In the meantime I presume he's my patient?"

Chris nodded. "We may get nearer the solution of Raulson's murder by watching him on the quiet than by putting him over the jumps," he murmured. "I'll ask the captain to assign him to some light deck work, polishing brass, or something of the sort, where we can have a few of the crew whom we can trust keeping an eye on him. I want to see if any of the passengers speak to him."

The steward arrived, bearing carelessly in his hands several bottles which meant delivery from torture to the man in the surgery.

CHRIS, thus entering his second day as a detective, with more to occupy his thoughts than when the unwelcome task was thrust upon him, walked briskly up to the boat-deck. A few young passengers, joyfully immune to *mal de mer*, were struggling with the difficulties of shuffleboard on a pitching deck.

They greeted him with shouted invitations to join them. But Chris, after carefully surveying their faces for bruises, smiled and declined on the ground of ship's business. He passed into the radio shack. The operator on duty nodded, and removed the earphones for a moment.

"The skipper told me yesterday to give you anything in the house," the radio man said flippantly. What'll you have—a dry Martini?"

"Thanks, no," said Chris. "I'd rather have copies of all messages sent or received by Smith to date, and also anything Raulson may have

sent before he disappeared. They'll be dry enough, I guess."

The operator handed him a few messages he had already sorted out. "That's the works," he said. "The old man's had a look at one already."

Chris nodded his thanks and fought his way forward against the wind that was assailing the ship on the starboard bow.

The result of the *Gloucester's* efforts to hold her course was a disturbing combination of pitch and roll that left Chris light on his feet one moment, as the deck fell away beneath him, and heavy the next, as it rose again.

The captain, as he had expected, was on the bridge. In the shelter of the house, Chris penciled a brief request to the commander to assign Sanders, the stowaway, to the deck instead of the engine-room, and left it with Baffin's boy.

The second officer, coming out of his room in oilskins, told him with a grin that the old man would probably be on the bridge all day and all night, if the barometer didn't steady.

"The book," said the second, gravely, "says that a rapid fall of the barometer means a sharp, quickly ended disturbance. But the book is vague about a barometer that falls suddenly, and then keeps on falling, like a drunken sailor. My guess is that we're in for a snorter, with Cape Stiff trimmings. Baffin won't be able to keep her on her course much longer."

"Heave her to, if you want to," Chris replied. "The more time I get for my little job the better."

He went below and buried himself in his narrow quarters to study the radio messages. A few sent by Raulson to acknowledge *bon voyage* messages he laid aside. Apparently the financier had sent no others.

The dispatch that Smith had written to announce the disappearance of his employer was filed within an hour after the finding of the coat in the stern. It was addressed to the code name of a brokerage firm.

"Regret to report Raulson ended life by jumping overboard last night period," the message read. "Left note quote I cannot face this any longer period They have got me at last comma Smith dash blocked me dash driven down the stock of my undertakings until there is nothing left for me but bankruptcy period Damn their smirking faces comma they'll never put me through that dash not while there's an ocean left to die in period End quote No instructions left period What shall I do question"

Chris stared at this painstakingly correct transcript, and then compared the wording carefully with the original of Raulson's note, which Captain Baffin had turned over to him.

"Another interesting little point," he murmured. "This note is quoted exactly. But the captain's had this original in his possession and had had it for an hour before this message was sent. If Smith is merely an innocent, distressed secretary, did he copy the note word for word before turning it in to the captain or did he memorize it, including punctuation? Of course if he'd written it himself or dictated it to his accomplice he could quote it."

He compared the radio message, in Smith's neat hand, with the sprawling penmanship of the suicide note, but could find no point of similarity.

Then he compared the note with a message of acknowledgment written by Raulson. There was a decided similarity, indeed, but it was too much for Chris to decide whether the slight difference he perceived

was due to strong emotion or to actual forgery. As Captain Baffin had pointed out, however, the signature of the suicide note was much more erratic than the body of the note.

"It's too much to expect that Smith, if he is guilty, would write that suicide letter in his own handwriting, you idiot," Chris told himself. "You aren't dealing with a moron, you know. But at least we'll be able to ask Smith an embarrassing question about how he could send a word-for-word transcript of that note."

He put his head between his hands, as if to compress his brain into activity, and studied the message. There were others, too, including several Smith had written in reply to radio queries from newspapers. In these he briefly confirmed the message he had sent to the brokers.

Chris groaned and stood up. "There ought to be some way to spike this little financial game, whatever it is, even if I don't pin Raulson's murder on them," he muttered. "How about working on it from that angle?"

His thoughts made him restless, and he left his room. He made his way up to the little-used shade deck, intending to have a smoke and a look at the towering seas on the windward side of the ship, while he mulled over this new phase of the case.

HE FOUND the deck he sought quite deserted, for the spray was flying over it in sheets as every comber charged the ship. A knot of passengers stood in the main doorway leading out, watching the conflict of ship and sea through the heavy glass. Among these he saw Smith, apparently unmoved by the storm, surveying the scene with lack-lustre eyes.

Chris halted beside the others, and received a quick, sliding glance and nod from Smith. Decidedly, Chris realized, he could take no stroll on the shade deck that day. He had not fully understood, until then, what a rough sea the *Gloucester* was bucking.

As he stood there, he suddenly caught a glimpse through the glass of the cocky young steward that Doctor Walters had sent to the purser's safe for his narcotics.

The man was on his way back to the safe now with the bottles, and he had chosen to shape his course along the weather side of the deck for the obvious purpose of displaying his indifference of the storm to the passengers. He strutted, with the bottles tucked under his arm and his hands in his pockets, whistling as he gazed seaward and ignoring the flying spray.

But, most abruptly, a huge wave rose beside the *Glocester* and slapped her iron plates a thunderous blow. The ship rose to it, as she had risen to half a dozen such seas that day, but a dash of water from the crest shot up and foamed inward, on the deck.

The suddenness with which that thin wall of water came whipping inboard on him startled the steward. In imagination he saw himself engulfed and swept overboard. With a yell of fear he lunged forward, toward the door that led to safety. The bottles he carried crashed to the deck, unheeded in his panic.

Chris Trenmore leaped through the group of spectators and tore open the door. The steward bolted through, but Chris thrust him aside and sprang out on the deck. But before he could reach the shattered bottles a vagrant retreating stream of water from farther forward sloshed over them. The wave dragged broken glass and contents

tinkling into the scuppers and over the ship's side.

Chris turned back to the entrance. He saw Smith staring at the cleared deck, but paid no attention to him. Sternly he confronted the wet, trembling steward.

"Did you drop every bottle, man?" he demanded.

"I—I couldn't 'elp it, sir," the man wailed. "It come at me like a whole ocean, it did, an' I took to my 'eels before I thought, sir. Lumme, sir, that chap can get along without 'is drugs, we 'as to get along without our beer in the States. The doctor just sent 'im up to the captain an' 'e looked as fit as——"

"Shut your mouth and report to the purser at once," Chris growled, and turned away. He hastened down to the surgery in a state of apprehension. He realized what this might mean to the unfortunate whose life and sanity depended upon the narcotics the ocean had taken away.

Doctor Walters, with a grave face, confirmed his fears. He had obeyed the captain scrupulously, and given the steward every narcotic from his cabinet.

"I'll see what I can do," he promised. "Sanders' impending collapse was instantly averted by the dose I gave him. I sent him up to the bridge house for orders. He'll be all right until tonight. Then we'll have to keep him in the isolation hospital aft. Poor devil, he's in for it, but I may be able to do something for him."

"I'll leave that to you, doctor," said Chris.

CHAPTER V

EXIT THE STOWAWAY

THE movement of the boat as he left the surgery told him that Captain Baffin had been compelled to swing the vessel several points southward, off her course, in order to head her into the rising seas. The throb of her engines was lessened somewhat, too, and that meant that she was practically hove to. The pitching seemed intensified, but the roll had almost disappeared.

Chris hurried up to the bridge house, feeling that with the easing of the ship he would get an opportunity to talk to Captain Baffin about keeping the unfortunate Sanders under surveillance.

On the boat-deck he caught a glimpse of the bo'sun and watch on deck hard at work double lashing the boats, a sign of unusually dirty weather ahead. The shuffleboard players had disappeared, for it was raining now.

"The captain will have to order all passengers kept off the decks pretty soon," he thought, as the *Gloucester* took a jolt that almost threw him from his feet. "That means there isn't much sense in having Sanders watched, for no passengers will have a chance to speak to him."

He continued forward. As he passed the main entrance to the decks below, his eye was attracted to something dark lying on the light tan of the floor covering. Stopping, he looked in.

There on the landing of the stairway was the long, thin body of the stowaway. It lay face downward, head toward Chris, arms outspread. He rushed in. A glance told him that the man was dead. The back of his head had been crushed.

"Murder!" Chris Trenmore muttered. "There's no other way that a man could get a blow like that there."

He glanced around, but there was no weapon in sight, nothing but the dead man outstretched on the spotless floor. His face was no

more pallid in death than it had been in life.

Chris ran out on deck, and hurriedly summoned a couple of sailors to spread a piece of canvas over the body, and dispatched another to call the doctor from below.

Then he darted down the stairs. He had not far to go. In the entrance to the smoking-room, idly viewing the chart of the ship's position, was Smith. There was no emotion on his face; no indication of repressed excitement in his deep-set eyes.

Chris experienced a sense of impotence as he passed on, with only a quick glimpse at that expressionless countenance. All hope of solving his problem, and the new problem of Sanders' murder, seemed to break down before the impassive blankness of Smith's unprepossessing countenance.

"I'll get him, and his fellow-murderer," Chris muttered, his voice shaking with restrained anger.

By another way he hastened upward to the chart room. There he found the commander of the *Gloucester*, just off the bridge.

"What's wrong?" asked the captain sharply.

Chris told him swiftly, then led the way to the spot where the body lay. Doctor Walters was there, arising from a brief scrutiny of the wound in the head.

"Instantaneous," he said. "It saves this poor fellow a lot of agony."

Captain Baffin glared at him. "But it means that another murder has occurred on my ship," he said.

"It means, too, that someone feared what Sanders had to tell," Chris Trenmore added. "He was on his way to report to you, captain."

"This way—up the main stairs?" Captain Baffin asked incredulously.

"No, sir," said Chris. "Undoubtedly he came up outside. He would have been stopped if he had tried to use the main stairs. But the murderer was waiting here for him, and called him in. What happened then I don't know, but as he turned to go—was almost outside—the murderer struck him from behind with something, and then strolled down the stairs, inside."

"Sounds likely," Captain Baffin admitted.

"It's only a guess," said Chris Trenmore, "but if anyone on board had seen the two together the murderer would not have dared to strike. If they had been on deck together the men of the watch would have seen them. Only if the murderer had come up these stairs alone, called in the stowaway, killed him, and gone downstairs again, was there a certainty, almost, that the meeting would be unobserved.

"Doubtless the murderer intended to heave the body overboard from this deserted deck, but could not because of the seamen coming up to lash the boats. But even as it is, I don't see a chance in the world of fastening this crime on anyone, unless——"

He stopped.

"Unless what?" asked Baffin.

"Unless you let me quit detecting and start bluffing," said Chris Trenmore. "As a detective I'm a failure, but you've no idea of the number of holes I've gotten out of by a little bluffing at the right time. And I have a hunch, a persistent hunch."

Captain Baffin's alert eyes questioned him.

"This," said Cris, indicating the body of the unfortunate drug-addict, "was the weak point in their rotten game. They must have let this old man into the conspiracy before they realized he was a slave to dope, and therefore utterly unreli-

able. Now they've wiped him out."

"Well?" inquired the commander of the *Gloucester* rather impatiently. "That puts them ahead, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Chris admitted. "But, look here, Captain. They've been afraid, deadly afraid, that we were getting closer to them. They risked murder again. That proves they're jumpy—apprehensive. We're in the dark, but maybe we can bluff them into believing we're not. Force them into another move. A guilty man will prove himself guilty if you give him enough rope. I've seen it happen before."

"I want no more moves—like this," Captain Baffin declared emphatically, as he looked down.

"We'll be ready, this time, if we have to use every man in the ship," Chris said doggedly. "As a detective I'm through—sunk. Oh, for some action! I'd give my eyes to get this hidden one out into the open, where I could get a hand on him. Captain, it's bluff or nothing!"

"Go ahead!" replied Captain Baffin. "Do it any way you like, but get me the man that threw Raulson overboard and cracked this poor fellow's skull for him."

"Right!" said Chris eagerly. He took his place a foot or two behind the feet of the body of Sanders. Without moving, he squinted thoughtfully out first the starboard and then the port exit to the deck. From his position all he could see on either side was a narrow strip of deck and two lifeboats, one on top of the other.

"Not much!" he muttered. "These men can remove the body now," he added, and then turned briskly to the captain and the doctor, who were watching him closely. "Now, gentlemen, if you'll come out on deck with me——"

The captain strode out, with the doctor and Chris behind him. The three men made their way to where the seamen were busy lashing the boats.

"Which of those men would unquestionably and rather unintelligently obey an order given by the captain, doctor?" he asked.

Doctor Walters looked them over with a glint in his eye, for, as Chris had seen, he was something of an amateur psychologist.

"That big, slow-moving fellow with the streak of yellow paint on his trouser-leg is a good man to obey orders, and, I would say, not in the least likely to question them," the old physician decided after a careful scrutiny of the men. "He is slow-witted and perhaps not much more than a moron."

"Good!" said Chris. "I'd pick him, too. Now, Captain, please call him over. Tell him that he is to answer 'Yes, sir,' to questions I intend to put to him later in the day before several people, and to stick to that answer, no matter what I say."

Captain Baffin restrained his curiosity with an effort, and nodded. "Bo'sun!" he roared.

The petty officer, who had been uneasily glancing sideways at the captain during this intense scrutiny of the men, responded.

"Send over that slow fellow who is paying out rope to the other man," he commanded.

The giant, a gray-haired, smooth-browed fellow, gazed at them with blue eyes in which amiability and a certain apprehension struggled for mastery.

"What's your name?" the captain asked.

"Jensen, sir."

"Well, Jensen, can you obey your captain?"

"Yes, sir; I always obey my captain," the sailor answered slowly,

wrinkling his narrow forehead in a puzzled way.

"Well, Jensen, I've picked you out to do something special for me," said the captain. "Do you see this officer?"

"Yes, sir," Jensen gazed intently at Chris Trenmore, and his eyes finally wandered down to the gold stripe, white-faced, on Trenmore's arm that indicated his rank.

"Well, Jensen, if you're called into the passenger quarters today I want you to answer 'Yes, sir' to any questions he puts to you. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," replied Jensen. It was plain to see that he was somewhat relieved at the simplicity of this order, for his forehead lost its wrinkles, and he smiled. "He ask me anyt'ing, I say, 'Yes, sir,'" he repeated.

"That's it," said the captain. "Don't forget, Jensen. You may go back to work now. And not a word to the other men. I'm relying on you, Jensen."

"Yes, sir," Jensen agreed, and with a salute returned proudly to the gang. They saw him shake his head as another sailor spoke to him.

Captain Baffin questioned Trenmore with a glance

"Now, sir, if you'll direct the radio man to write out a fake wireless message for me," Chris Trenmore said briskly. "Consciously and subconsciously, I've been trying to plan out some way to put a hole in this crooked financial scheme that I think is the reason for Raulson's murder. Well, now I've just thought of a method of undermining Smith's sublime calm."

In the lee of the radio shack Captain Baffin paused. "This is a serious matter, faking up a radio message, Chris, but I have confidence in you," he said, and entered.

Obediently the radio man on watch wrote, in his fluent characterless script, the message that Chris dictated.

"From steamship — insert some ship following the same course that we are, and behind us, preferably a tramp steamer," he directed. "Now then:

"BAFFIN, SS. GLOUCESTER:

"Picked up exhausted man from sea. Can get no coherent statement yet but believe he is Jasper Raulson, reported missing by *Gloucester*. Tells strange story claiming attempted murder, not suicide. Communicating with New York."

"Sign with some ship's name," Chris said, as he finished the message. "Mark it delayed by atmospheric conditions." He turned to Dr. Walters.

"Now, then, Doctor, please go below and organize some stewards who have been with the ship two or three voyages to cover the main deck, so that Smith cannot go anywhere without being under constant observation.

"Don't let anyone follow him; that might make him suspicious. But let the men be loitering about, as if on duty, so that they cover every corridor he might go down, and every stairway. I will arrange with Clintock and the assistant pursuers to have stewards alert on the awning, shade, and promenade decks, and——"

"I'll have an officer and some men look out for this deck," Captain Baffin finished. "I think I understand part of your strategy, Chris. Get to work on it, then."

THE three men separated, and within twenty minutes trusted men were on watch in every part of the ship accessible to passengers. After a final inspection Chris, with the prepared radio in his hand, sought out the man against whom he had been unable to produce even a shred of positive evidence.

Smith was sitting in the lounge, a magazine on his lap, his dead white face turned calmly toward the ocean. His expression did not change as he looked up and saw Chris standing over him.

"Mr. Smith, as you know, Captain Baffin assigned me to the duty of obtaining a report on Mr. Raulson's death," Chris said smoothly. "But we have had some information from an unexpected source. It may come as somewhat of a shock to you, so Captain Baffin asked me to prepare you."

During this rambling speech the financial secretary had been looking upward with increasing attention. His eyes fixed upon the radio form in Chris' hand and flicked swiftly to Chris' face and away again.

"What is it?" Smith asked abruptly. There was no perturbation in his countenance, as Chris noted reluctantly, but he spoke with quick interest.

"You'd better read this yourself," Chris replied, and handed him the message. His eyes dwelt piercingly upon Smith's pallid face, as the secretary's eyes leaped from line to line along the brief words that seemed to restore Jasper Raulson to life. But there was in his expression no overwhelming rush of fear; no sign of guilt detected. Nothing, that Chris could read, but absorbed attention and a mounting excitement.

"Good God!" exclaimed Smith, at the end, starting to his feet. "Do you mean to tell me this fool"—he indicated the mythical master of the freighter with a shake of the message—"has radioed this rot to New York?"

He jerked his watch from his pocket and shot an agitated glance at it. "When was this sent? What time is it now—New York time?"

"We're three hours ahead of New York, sir," said Chris with a deliberation calculated to heighten Smith's sudden emotion. "Captain Baffin thought you might be pleased at this news, sir."

"Pleased!" repeated Smith. He seemed to be thinking deeply, almost ignoring Chris, but he emerged from this absorption with a start. He regarded Chris's blank face with keen eyes, though not for more than an instant. "Of course, I'd be pleased if—if I thought it was true, purser. But Raulson was a very determined man—if he tried suicide he would go through with it."

"But the suggestion of murder?" Chris inquired.

"Nonsense!" snapped Smith. "Nonsense! You must excuse me now. I—I must think." He whirled about and walked out of the lounge.

At the head of the stairs, beside an idling steward, he paused, casting a keen glance back at the room from which he had come, but there was no sign of Chris. He descended the stairs at a pace he tried to make unhurried, and turned his head again as he reached the deck below. But there was no one behind him.

Chris, after waiting several moments, came slowly out of the lounge. He eyed the steward questioningly.

"Down the stairs, sir, in something of a hurry," the white-coated servant said softly.

Chris nodded and followed at a leisurely pace. One of Clintock's assistants sat at the desk in the inquiry office, which faced the stairs on the deck below. He was talking to a passenger, but he surreptitiously pointed toward the port corridor.

"Must be going to his own stateroom," Chris thought, in deep disappointment.

Bartlett, the stateroom steward of that section, was chatting with the stewardess in a transverse passage half-way down the corridor, but he

turned a countenance on which lingered a vestige of surprise to Chris.

"'E turned in at the corridor next beyond his own, sir," he reported, in a whisper. "I stepped out of 'ere with a pile of towels under my arm and saw him plain, sir. And I 'eard 'im knock and say something, savage like, and the next instant that nurse in Number 206 came out and walked away."

"The nurse in 206 came out!" Chris repeated. "That's the stateroom that connects with Raulson's, isn't it?"

"The feeble old gentlemen's stateroom, sir; Mr. Grundle. 'E's in there now—hasn't poked 'is nose out since it got roughish yesterday, so the nurse told me."

"That old fellow?" Chris muttered in overwhelming chagrin. "Ridiculous!"

Bartlett suddenly straightened up. "The captain, sir," he whispered. Chris turned. Baffin was striding down the corridor, his feet planted firmly against the motion of the boat and his manner eager.

"I've come to be in at the death, Chris," he said in a low voice. "Have you run him to earth?"

"I have, I think, but in a strange place," said Chris. "He's in that old invalid's stateroom, adjoining the one that was Raulson's. There's something deucedly mysterious about it, much more mysterious than I thought. That old man can't be his accomplice—the man who tackled me was a big man, with arms and legs twice the size of Grundle's. Have I your permission to go through that door, sir?"

"You have," said Captain Baffin grimly.

"Thanks!" Chris muttered. He turned to the steward. "Bartlett, send another man up to get Jensen. Keep him outside in the corridor until I call him into that room."

"Where does Jensen come into it?" demanded Baffin, as Bartlett hurried down the corridor.

A half-smile swept across Cris' intent face.

"Jensen's going to answer: 'Yes, sir,' when I ask him if he was in Number 3 lifeboat, where he could see into the entrance to the main stairs about the time the stowaway got his," he explained. "It's bluff, captain, bluff. If I can make 'em think we have a witness to that murder, anything may happen!"

The liner captain grunted approvingly. He was committed to Chris' desperate expedient now; he intended to stand unswervingly back of his subordinate.

Bartlett returned to them.

"Wait in the corridor and watch Raulson's door in case Smith or anyone else tries to break out that way," Chris instructed him. "Now then!"

CHAPTER VI

CHRIS REALIZES AN AMBITION

TOGETHER Chris and the captain walked down the corridor.

"They probably won't make any trouble, but — what's that?"

They were almost opposite the inner wall of the invalid's cabin. To them came a voice, muffled but powerful, shaking, vibrating with emotion. It was the tone of a man beside himself with rage. It had in it a dread something that halted them in their tracks, with prickling scalps and straining ears.

"— blasted fool, you! Somebody's on—corpse will hang us!"

A shrill, high voice, hardly recognizable as Smith's, replied, freeing them from the spell. On toes, they rounded the corner and again that deep furious voice halted them, just before the door of the stateroom.

"You snivel—rat, you've ruined——"

Chris Trenmore raised his fist; knocked loudly on the door.

Silence came instantly within.

"Open!" Chris commanded. "Captain's orders!"

He turned the knob. The door was locked. Through the thin boards came a creaking sound, but no answer.

Chris braced himself, and found the captain's body pressed against the door beside him. Together they swayed. The wood around the lock splintered; the door banged open.

In the middle of the cabin stood Smith, his chalky face to the door, his trembling hands raised to them almost in appeal.

At first glance there was no one else in the room. Then Chris' darting eyes saw a huge bulk beneath a blanket in the upper berth. He took a step forward.

From under the covering at the other end of the berth a great arm, mottled, hairy, with thick, clutching fingers, swept out. It seemed to move slowly, ponderously, as befitted its size. Yet before Chris could take another step the fingers had closed around a heavy cut glass water bottle and lifted it from the rack above the washstand. The hand raised the bottle as another hand might flourish a pipe, and then, in an easy sweep, brought it down upon Smith's motionless head.

There was a crack, a sickening, undescribable sound and the secretary sagged, crumpled, lay on the floor. The force of that sudden, effortless blow had wiped his head out of human semblance.

The shock of the thing drained all force and vitality out of both Chris Trenmore and the captain. Their eyes had no power to lift from the thing on the floor—the thing that a second before had been a man.

THE blanket, falling upon the body, aroused them. Out of the upper berth a face, distorted, empurpled, with starting, congested veins, glared at them; then the man, clad in white pajamas, surged out of the bunk. One eye was bruised, discolored. His huge chest was half-bare. His long arms gripped the sideboard, and the next instant, noiselessly, he had dropped to the floor.

"Raulson!" muttered the captain, still half-stupefied. "It's Raulson!"

It was, indeed, the man they had thought dead, though the terrible face confronting them had little likeness to the bluff, hearty countenance Chris remembered.

Chris' hand slipped behind him, his fingers encircled the butt of his automatic, and he snapped it out. He swung it up to cover the fearsome apparition that had come upon them out of a shriveled invalid's berth.

Dimly in that minute Chris understood that Grundle must have been in the plot. Then realization flashed into his mind that it was Grundle who lay dead up on the boat deck, that crabbed old skeleton and the wasted drug addict were one.

But he had no time to think now.

"Put up——" he began when, with that deceptively unhurrying movement the huge hand of Raulson swept up, closed around the gun, and whipped it out of his hand. His finger, dragging against the trigger, sent a shot crashing into the blanket on Smith's body before the weapon was whisked from his hand.

Captain Baffin was charging now—was almost upon the raging financier. The hand with the gun raised higher, flicked forward, and the automatic whizzed like a bullet through the air. It thudded against Baffin's shoulder, and the power behind the blow spun the heavy officer

around and dropped him against the door.

With hardly a break in the movement the hand that had hurled the automatic snapped out and impinged upon Chris' face. The fingers wide-spread, instead of knotted into a fist, dug in, like claws, ripping gashes in his cheeks, his chin and his nose.

Chris' feet slid on the blood-spattered floor beside the dead secretary, and he went over backwards. Despite the flare of pain in his face he was conscious that he and the captain were scrambling about together on the floor, that the captain was straining under the bunk to reach the pistol. Feebly he tried to roll to his knees to meet the onslaught of the maddened financier.

Raulson, his plans thwarted, had summoned up all the force of the will and brain that had made him a hated power in Wall Street and was expending it in one great storm of revenge or lunacy. He was running amuck!

Chris got to his knees, braced himself tensely. But the giant, snarling in his throat, had turned his back on the foes that he had dropped weltering to the floor. His great shoulder seemed merely to brush against the inner door. It flew back with a crash, and Raulson padded into the other stateroom. Another door—the door that MacDonar had sealed and padlocked with such care—went down like a tissue paper partition, and the raging man was out in the corridor.

"Bartlett! Jensen!" roared Captain Baffin. "Stop that——"

He broke off with a groan as a man's body thumped against the wall of the cabin, and a shriek of fear rang out in the passage.

Chris, shaking the streaming blood from his face, sped out after Raulson. He had wished for action; he was getting it now.

Raulson plunged along the corridor toward the bow of the ship. The sound of the fight and the pistol shot had brought passengers out in alarm. The maddened man thrust through the groups as if he were pushing his way through underbrush. His great arms, swinging, mowed men and women off their feet. It was not flight; the man raged through the ship like a lion in a trap, destroying unseeingly everything that happened in his way.

Chris, rounding the corner, sped past the fallen forms of Bartlett and Jensen. The steward was sobbing in agony, his hands to his stomach. The big sailor's ear was half-torn off, as if Raulson's great, swift fingers had wrenched at it in awful jest when the man had tried to stop him.

By the trail of shrieks and cries Chris followed the ravening creature. He was going straight ahead down the corridor, and his way became empty of passengers and crew as panic spread out ahead of him.

Chris had but a vague thought of what he was doing. He knew that should the creature turn on him he would have little chance. But his blood was racing through his body and his brain; his was the job of preventing further bloodshed—murder—by this man. He must do that without thought of consequence. Action! Here it was, swifter, deadlier action than five continents had offered.

A clang of iron told him that Raulson had moved straight on, and wrenched open the door leading out on deck. It had been battened against the storm, but Raulson had thrust on, still rushing straight along on his unreasoning way.

Out upon the empty fore-deck he charged, past the companionway leading to the forecastle. A sailor,

coming out, took one affrighted look at the demented, half-naked man and darted down the steps.

Chris darted out onto the pitching, spray-swept deck. If he could only keep the man here until help came! But there was only one way to do it! He ran on over the slippery planking.

Raulson's reasonless rush brought him almost to the bows. Suddenly he turned his blotched, twitching face over his shoulder. He saw Chris following. He stopped.

For an instant he stood here, glaring, with bared teeth, at the man whose face he had ripped. Some sort of purpose came into his contorted countenance. Balancing himself on the slippery deck, he lunged toward Chris. His big legs moved at the unhurried rate of the arms that had spread destruction. His hands swung up ahead of him, already gripping for Chris's body.

AS the bow of the ship plunged deep into the sea, a wave, rising with sudden power, jarred and interrupted the regular movement. It was that which destroyed the calculated effect of the madman's attack. Chris flung himself to one side, untouched. His own fist, as he struck out, encountered nothing. Raulson had moved too swiftly.

In an instant the man had whirled around. Chris, retreating before the horrible menace in his face, found himself backing into the narrowing bows. Every step penned him in more tightly.

Raulson came on. He was crouching now, the long, powerful arms stretched out before him, the fingers moving spasmodically. Chris could hear his deep, hard breathing; could almost feel its warmth. He summoned all his strength and took a quick step toward the madman. The great hands reached for him like darting snakes.

But Chris had planned well. His next step was sideways, and up onto a pair of bitts with lightening-like speed. He leaped high, from the iron posts, and his feet swept inches above the clutch of the gripping fingers.

He brought up standing from his jump. Raulson, who had spun around and broken into a shambling run, shot within reach. Chris was ready. His hard, compact fist, with his whole body behind it, crashed against Raulson's cheekbone. His knuckles spurted blood.

The madman blinked, and reached out at once, with his fingers hooked and hungry. From the congested veins of his cheek blood was pouring. Chris, leaping backward, knew that he had failed even to jar his frenzied antagonist.

Spray drenched with stinging salt the wounds in Chris's face. His blood, the blood of a fighter, surging through him, sent him in again, against this thing that could not be hurt, this thing of clutching hands, of crushing arms. With desperate disregard of danger he pounded the man's face and his hard, drumlike chest. A forefinger, blunt, sharp-nailed, thrust at him. Hard as a dagger, the thing ripped past his eye, cutting him anew. An inch more would have gouged it out.

Without pause the clutching hands slipped down, and closed about his middle. He felt them sinking in under his ribs, constricting his vitals. Agony, poignant, breath-taking, darted up to his brain.

Chris jerked up his leg, thrust his foot full at the other's belt, and kicked out. The backward force of the thrust released him from the contracting hands. He staggered away, and by an effort of will recovered his footing.

There was no sign of pain in Raulson's red-smeared face. Noth-

ing but mad, undeviating purpose to slay. The maniac's left eyebrow had been slashed by one of Chris's blows. His eye was winking rapidly as the blood streamed into it. On he came again, at a run.

Chris had youth, skill, endurance and courage fighting on his side. He knew that, but he knew, too, that all these things were powerless against such madness as was arrayed against him.

But he was not fighting now to keep Raulson from dashing back through the crowded ship; he was fighting for the lust of fighting, fighting to kill this unkillable thing before him. His breath was coming fast through his drying throat, and a fire seemed consuming his lungs.

He met the rush. All he had he put into a swing for Raulson's other eye—the one through which he still could see.

Even as his blow crashed fair into the eye, the long arms whipped about him, drawing him too close to Raulson's heaving chest to draw up a knee—too close, almost, to strike out. The man's face, streaming blood and sweat, was horribly near; his slavering mouth was wide in an animal snarl.

Why did they not come? The seconds that the fight had taken seemed everlasting to Chris. Was he deserted—left to fight on and on forever with this beast—until——

He played his last card. With all his strength he bent backward from the waist, gathering every inch of play, every inch of room he could. Then he twisted sideways. Like a spring released he shot the knuckles of his right fist, swift as an arrow, full at the man's Adam's apple.

The hands about him did not relax. But they did not tighten. The battered face stiffened, more terrible than ever in its immobility. Chris planted his bruised hands on the man's breastbone, and pushed and pounded himself free even as the momentary paralysis passed, and life came back into the stricken face.

He faltered backward, almost against the rail. Back—always back—could he never finish this thing that followed him always? He tightened his hands into fists, but they hung heavy at his sides.

The ship pitched high on a great comber, and he had difficulty in keeping his feet.

Raulson came on. He was making noises in his throat now, animal noises. He flung himself forward in that same unreasoning, unfearing attack. Invulnerable, he made no effort at defense.

The ship ascended, dropped from the top of the wave as if doomed to dive to the ocean's bottom. As the men drew close again a wall of green water came roaring over the bows and cut them down. In a turbid flood of green and white they were hurled aft, rolled over and over, permeated with stinging, hissing brine.

The rioting sea flung Chris against the side of the forward hatch, and the breath left his body. But though pain squeezed his heart and his body seemed iron-bound, he struggled slowly to his feet in the subsiding torrent. He strained his stinging eyes.

Raulson was there. The wave had carried him further down the deck, to a winch, and his head or neck had crashed violently against the iron drum. The sound sang in Chris' ears above the shriek of wind and roar of sea. No man could take such a blow.

But Raulson moved. He reared easily to his feet before the water had ceased to pour over him.

"God!" Chris gasped. He staggered toward him. All other thought

but to fight this unbeatable thing had left him. He must go on, on, hammering this clutching, horrible creature till the life left his own body.

The salt in his flaming throat gagged him; he bent half double in his anguish, and then pushed on. His feet splashed and dragged along the wet deck.

Raulson had not moved. Head on one side, he seemed to be awaiting Chris—or listening. Chris was within six paces now.

Suddenly the maniac charged. Hands out ahead, in that menacing clutch, he rushed toward Chris. Vainly Chris spurred himself to take a fighting pose. His hands seemed numb. Raulson was coming fast.

By a supreme effort Cris drew back his right hand. And then Raulson, mouthing snarls, his right eye closed and his left eye a well of blood, brushed by his shoulder. He rushed on. His fingers were gripping, feeling this way and that. Blind!

Five feet further was the rail. In full career he hit the iron bars. His body hurtled over. His clutching hands clutched nothing. He dropped, those dreadful fingers still seeking, into the smother of raging water alongside.

Sternward, flung this way and that by leaping waves, he drifted. Above where the port propeller sucked and cut its way with remorseless certainty he disappeared.

Chris, wavering to his feet, became aware that men were hurrying up to him; that Captain Baffin himself, pallid, one arm hanging limp from a useless shoulder, was dragging himself toward him. And then the ship and the sea and the men faded out.

LATER that day Chris Trenmore, his head in a mass of bandages in which only eyes and lips were free, listened with listless attention to Captain Baffin's report of subsequent developments. He was half-sitting, half-reclining in an invalid's chair, and he had neither the power nor the will to move his pain-racked body. Those mangling fingers had left more than a momentary record, written in anguish, behind them.

"From the radio reports and what I got out of the nurse, Raulson was going to stay 'dead' in that stateroom until we got to Southampton," Captain Baffin said.

The commander himself had his shoulder tightly bandaged and he still limped. But the *Gloucester* was back on her course once more, fighting a subsiding storm, the mystery was over, and Chris still lived. Baffin was satisfied.

Chris nodded slowly. The captain went on:

"Then in port, after the others had skipped, he'd be discovered, and tell a yarn of how his enemies had drugged him and faked his suicide to affect the market. In that way Raulson would whipsaw the market and his enemies twice, first on the news of his suicide, which would depress his stocks, and again when he was found alive, which would make them soar.

"Grundle, according to the nurse, was an old actor picked for the job by Smith. He didn't find out until too late that he was a drug fiend. Then they had to take heroin along to dole out to him.

"When you took the bottle and they failed to steal some from the surgery, there was nothing for it but to take Grundle's wig and make-up off and let him be discovered as a stowaway.

"He was willing; it was the likeliest way for him to get his doses. But when all the narcotics were lost overboard by that fool of a steward, they feared he would go to pieces

and tell everything he knew. So Smith killed Grundle."

Chris moved his head again. "Smith shoved—shoved him overboard—no trace," he mumbled painfully. "That's—why — Raulson enraged. When—we—burst in—Raulson realized—Smith was followed. Went off head—completely. Plans ruined—broke—accessory — murder —brained Smith. Wanted kill—everybody—I guess.

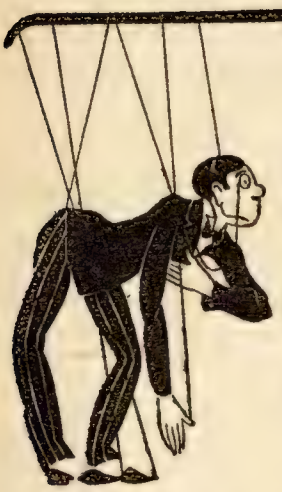
"He certainly wanted to kill you," murmured Captain Baffin, with a look of wonder at the shrouded figure of the younger man. That Chris still lived after coming to grips with that ravening monster was a miracle to him.

Chris Trenmore essayed a grin, cautiously. "Wanted—action. Not—secrets. Got action. No more—too much. Through detective work. Too —rough."

The Phantom of Cortés

By ALICE I'ANSON

THEY say the Conqueror of the Valley sleeps
With all the dusky brood of hill and plain,
He who descended, godlike, from the steeps
To spill a nation's blood for greed of gain!
But, O Cortés, tho' time has softly spread
Its mantle o'er the unremembered dead,—
In all the likeness of a living shape,
With the chill aura of the astral sphere,
And garbed in hat and plume and flowing cape,
You haunt the starless gloom, the moonlight clear!
That valiant race is gone like summer's dew,
Dissolved like hoar-frost where the sunbeam creeps,
But oh! no place of rest can shelter you,
Nor calm oblivion hide you in its deeps,
Nor soft embrace of time bring peace at last,
Grim Phantom of the Unforgotten Past!



Once An Actor—

By
EDWINA MacDONALD

"YOUNG John don't make no nevermind who knows he's all het up over the big doin's," Major Beaumont vouchsafed, his gaze resting with unappreciative briefness on the curious figure of a tall, snowy-haired man, straight of back and astonishingly nimble of limb, who was executing a dainty minuet on the embowered walk.

Private Ben Thompson nodded absently, his dim eyes peering through the trees at a group of workmen hammering industriously on a big platform in the centre of the clearing.

Pickett Cottage, on whose veranda the two old men sat, was one of the semicircle of two-story yellow cottages which bounded a single side of the walled camp like a golden crescent set under the centenarian trees.

Every veranda held its group of old men. They had spent the greater part of the morning brushing uniforms, polishing shoes, not forgetting to pin the sacred iron crosses on their breasts, and now they watched uneasily the progress of the grand stage in construction on the sun-flooded green. If it should not be finished in time——

Nobody paid any attention to the dancer. It was no new sight to see "Young John" kicking up his heels.

On this afternoon the manager of the Keith Vaudeville in town was bringing his whole show out to the Old Soldiers' Home in the outskirts of Richmond, for a benefit performance. And with society talking about it and selling tickets, Mr. Bloom had gone to considerable expense, erecting a big stage in the green compound and putting in seats, every one of which had been sold and a thousand over. Additional seats were being hurriedly constructed.

As a truck loaded with scenery turned in through the big gate, roaring up the driveway, Young John, as the camp had facetiously nicknamed John Hudson, paused in his dainty dance, a wistful light creeping into his curiously youthful eyes. There was eagerness in his hurried step as he turned into the

"auditorium" with its rows of crude benches. He sat down well to the front.

Stagehands, dropping off the truck, had begun walking away with mountain crags, wooded ravines and big-bodied trees, which were rapidly set up.

The old man's heart throbbed painfully as he watched this so familiar business, a thousand memories trouping up, falling one against another; memories of the long gypsy trail over which his life had reached.

"Take up the slack on the backing, Bill," called the head carpenter, standing down in front of a space roped off for the orchestra. A green mountain moved convulsively as by the leviathan hand of an unseen magician. "Hold it." But the mountain tipped crazily at one end and lopped forward.

John Hudson got to his feet. "Give her an inch on your right and take up two inches left!" he shouted authoritatively. The mountain moved. "Steady. Set." His tall, spare form was erect, his white head lifted in proud command.

The head carpenter wheeled. "Say, how do you get that-a-way, grandpa?" he demanded indignantly.

"I beg your pardon," said John. "I spoke without thinking. I'm an old showman. Hudson's my name. Had my own show for a number of years. Hudson Theatre Company. Best little one-nighter on the road," he finished proudly.

"Never heard of it," replied the offended carpenter. Ignoring the pleading recognition in the old man's eyes, he turned to the truck. "All set. C'mon, boys."

JOHN sat down precipitously, swept by a sense of shame. His uniform had betrayed him. Proclaimed him as rubbish. It was unthinkable. He knew, of course, when he thought about it, that he was past seventy. But he never could quite get over a sense of shock at sight of his reflection in a mirror. With eager, blue eyes twinkling back at him—dreamer's eyes they were and absurdly young—it didn't seem reasonable. It was more as if he were made up for a part and was, underneath the powdered hair and grease paint, still Miss May Ralston's stalwart young leading man and manager-husband.

There were moments, however, when he thought of Renie and of a certain shameful night out of his kaleidoscopic career, in which he felt desperately old.

Renie must be dead. Surely she would have written him if she had been alive. Sometimes he wanted to cry out to her; to send his voice into the far spaces of the earth until she must hear his agony and come for him. But memory mocked him Even if she were to come.... He shivered as with violent cold. Nothing could induce him to repeat that night of horror. And yet it had been his dream to die in harness. At the fall of the last curtain—like Ted Jackson.

Poor old Ted! Dying all through the show—but with the actor's conviction that the show must go on, holding out till the fall of the curtain.

What a winter that had been! Making towns by stagecoach. Everybody bundled in blankets pinned up to their eyes, and the pale sun asparkle on a hard frozen world. Legs cramped. Thermometer below thirty. Wind stabbing through blankets. All in the day's work. Nobody minded. That winter had cost John both wife and daughter.

His hair had seemed to turn white overnight. But an infant granddaughter to guard against the terrors of croup, in addition to acting

and managing a show, left him no time for self-pity.

Moreover, Renie was the most bewitching little golden-haired sprite that ever blessed a man's life. She had May's delicate features and Margaret's big, serious brown eyes. Her mother and grandmother rolled into one; exquisite, altogether entrancing.

John carried her on one night when a "prop baby" was needed, and turning her big solemn eyes on the audience, she cooed loudly, reaching out her little fat arms as if to say: "This is my début. Please, won't you like me?"

The audience applauded and laughed and shouted until John had to come down front and make a speech for her. But the leading woman got sore. It spoiled her big scene. She couldn't get them to settle down. They kept breaking out over some new antic of Renie's. The little witch seemed to know that she was the star. And there was no denying that she was doing what is known in the profession as "hogging the show."

When Renie was five, John had to quit swearing. "Why tant I say damn?" she demanded when John tried to correct her. "'Tis too nice word, Daddy John. Oo say damn. I say damn, too."

"By George, she's right at that," whispered John to his character man.

The worst trial was when he had to give up his pipe. But he never could recollect to put the thing out of Renie's reach. And, of course, he couldn't have it around making her sick; though she was altogether adorable, her yellow head barely reaching his make-up shelf, her solemn brown eyes on the door watching for him, and that great black pipe in her rosebud mouth. John had to laugh. A worry and a delight.

Almost before he realized it, Renie was old enough to play *ingénues*. And though she was a child of the gypsy clan, she was an instinctive home-maker. As soon as they would get their rooms, adjoining if possible, she would get out all the photographs of their professional friends and arrange them on the forlorn dressers, pinning others against the grimy pattern of the wall-paper.

She would cover her hotel trunk with bright cretonne, set an alcohol lamp and a few dishes on the rickety table, and go shopping. What feasts they had after the show! Hot chocolate, toasted crackers, sweet pickles and always a "surprise" for Daddy John. Usually a bit of limburger cheese.

But then came troublous times. Motion pictures were putting a crimp into the legitimate business. Actors who had lacked the "class" demanded by the big shows were flocking to the motion picture centres where voice, enunciation and manner were of no importance. Also the public, quickly educated to the magnificence of the pictures, became more and more exacting.

The midnight suppers were omitted. John and Renie began passing up the hotels to hunt "rooms." But in spite of everything salaries fell behind.

To make matters worse, Renie had been stung by the Broadway bee. John argued, then sold at the worst part of the season. By the time back salaries were paid there wasn't much left. Jerry Blake, his stage manager, pointed out to John that he was several kinds of an old fool, and they parted without saying good-by.

And now, for the first time in his forty years in the theatre, John

Hudson began tramping from agents' offices to managers. The big fellows wouldn't look at them. Pretty as Renie was with her yellow curls and big brown eyes, the question always came, "Has she been on Broadway? Sorry. Nothing."

How did one get on Broadway for the *first time?* Even the small fry managers were shy of "joint engagements." Trouble with one, meant losing two people.

When their money was about all gone they began answering ads in the *Billboard* and *The Clipper*. But forty-five per, joint, to a man who has owned his own show, even if he did sometimes draw no salary at all, was galling. And it is one thing to play a "bit" with your own company, from choice, and another to have it handed to you if you are an experienced actor.

FINALLY, in sheer desperation, John set himself to manufacture a vaudeville skit which would feature Renie's wistful charm and give himself the hard work. For even John's idolatry could not blind him to the fact that Renie was but an indifferent actress.

"Maybe that won't knock their eyes out!" he said joyously, when he had finished reading the act to her. Renie's part was light, saucy, with a solemn whimsy that was delicious, like Renie herself. She would not have to act. And John's part, while shouldering the burden, handed the sympathy to her "on a platter."

"But, Daddy John, it's old stuff," protested Renie.

"So's love old stuff. And hate, and birth, and death. All the big stuff is old stuff, kid. I tell you, it's a winner—if I can get the booking," he added.

Renie's brown eyes filled. "It's nothing but a rehash of one of our old plays brought up to date. I heard you say yourself it wasn't even in print any more."

"That's the point, kid. It's brought up to date. The old plays, the ones that were good, are as good today as they ever were. You can't be a showman, with your fingers on the public pulse for forty years, without finding out that it's the same old bunk, over and over, that goes."

"But you had your fingers on the Rube pulse, Daddy John. And that's different."

"Scenery, kid. A man makes money, builds a fine house, dolls himself up, sends his kids to college, but deep down inside of him he's the same old Rube he used to be."

"Maybe *he* is. But his *kids* ain't. They know things."

"What things? How to talk out of a dictionary and go to a more expensive tailor. Scenery. That's all. The women are just as scared of mice as their grandmothers were. And I haven't yet heard of a mouse that ever attacked a woman. They're as scared as the women. But the women can't learn that. And can men learn in colleges and smart tailor shops that war don't do anything but enlarge the graveyards? We think because folks have money they haven't got the same feelings we have. Take it from me, kid, 'big time' or 'little,' no matter how heavy the outside's plated, we all got the same works inside."

John could speak as good English as anybody, but, like so many troupers, he found slovenly, incorrect English more colorful.

Came the difficult business of finding a man for the third part. Nobody, who could get anything else, wanted to take a chance on an untried act. John thought himself in luck when he ran across Bob Glass.

Bob was tall and dark, cleancut as to profile and looked like a million dollars in his street clothes—one of those actors who can always land a road job on his looks, and who is always back on Broadway at the end of two weeks. John cut the part to the minimum and Bob filled its requirements—good looks.

John kept hammering till he got a showing. A smelly little house in the vicinity of New York, with planks laid in the basement dressing-rooms to keep the actors' feet dry. A dark-visaged audience eating peanuts throughout the show, and a policeman in the orchestra pit to keep order. But, to the surprise even of John, they forgot their peanuts during the quiet scenes and "ate up the act."

"Yeah, it's there," said John's agent. "But 'small time.' All right for low-brows with no brains 'cept-in' what they got under their shirt-fronts. No novelty."

"That's the point," argued John. "It reaches the brains we got under our shirt-fronts, and that's the brains that keeps the race marchin'."

Renie had two diamond rings; her grandmother's. John pawned them to give the act a handsome set. He kept hammering and at last got his chance to show the act before an audience reputed to keep its brains above the collar.

Renie was terrorized by the faces beyond the footlights. A sigh of resignation went up from the auditorium as the dialogue began. Programs rustled in lieu of peanut shells. Presently the rustle ceased. Silence fell on a vaudeville house. An old man, unknown to Broadway, who was, nevertheless, finished in the art of illusion, had drawn a little section of New York into the great frozen North, with its silence and its mystery and its primitive passions, and had gripped it with the world's urge of love and splendid human sacrifice. Old as the dawn, yet new with each recurring day.

Two weeks at the Palace! Booked solid to the coast! Letters coming into the office for return dates that they couldn't fill for a year.

Such splendor! Renie had to have swell clothes; and being "big timers," they quit stopping at "dumps" and having supper in their rooms.

Renie liked lights and music, and she was so pretty and sweet she was entitled to whatever she wanted. Couldn't save much, but—not many girls would trot around with an old grandfather as if he were a dashing beau.

Not that John felt old. In fact, when consulting Renie's wishes in a smart café, with laughter and jazz in his ears, eyes turning toward his table, John felt indeed a dashing beau. His tall, straight form was at its best in dinner clothes, and his youthful blue eyes were the windows of a happy soul.

Stage-johnnies a-plenty strove to get acquainted with Renie. Performers on the bills tried to intrigue her interest with invitations to supper. But she always shook her curly head in that impudent way she had. "Daddy John is all the beau I want," she would assure John.

THEN, when they had been out about six months, she began suggesting that they invite Bob to supper. John ought to have seen what was coming. But when they reached 'Frisco, and Renie announced one night that she and Bob had been married that afternoon, John was stunned.

Renie tossed her head wilfully. "I love him, and if you got to kick up

a row, Bob says I've made a hit in this act, and he's got a friend who will write something for us, and wait for his money till we get bookings."

"I don't see what your marryin' Bob has got to do with your gettin' another act," John forced himself to say. "It 'll just be a family affair like when May and Margaret and your father and me was together. 'Less you're tired of Daddy John's company."

Renie was at once all smiles. She rubbed her head against his arm like a purring kitten. "I love you better'n all the world, Daddy John, next to Bob."

John winced and, patting her hand, accepted his new position in her affections. And now, instead of Bob being the guest at John's parties, John found himself waiting for an invitation; oftener than not being left to wend his way to his hotel alone.

Renie and Bob pooled their resources, and Renie's salary consisting of half the act's income, John was no longer needed to pay the checks. Moreover, Bob seemed to have a grouch on of late whenever John was around.

In Cincinnati, the following spring, John's dressing-room adjoined Bob's and Renie's, being separated from it by a partition that reached only part way to the ceiling. John, coming in late on Saturday night, was horrified to hear Renie crying.

"I tell you he's crabbin' the act," Bob was saying. "He may of been good oncet, but he's a has-been. The house manager's beefin' turrible. He says to me, 'The act's there an' the girl's there, but you need a younger man in the part. The old boy ain't got the guts. He don't put his stuff over."

"But I can't tell him that, Bob," sobbed Renie. "Anyway, it's his act."

"All right. First thing you know some manager 'll can us; the office 'll begin gettin' bad reports, an' the act 'll be canceled." Bob's voice rose. "If he loved you so much like he beefs 'bout doin' he'd blow of his own free will. Can't he see he's through?"

"Sh-h-h!" gasped Renie. "You gotta be careful what you say in these rooms, Bob."

Mechanically, John began smearing his face with grease paint, smoothing it out until he appeared expressionless, almost featureless. Then he applied vermilion to give a healthy tan, laid on powder thickly, removing the surplus, and with black cosmetic restored brows and lashes, the entire business being done carefully, precisely, yet without consciousness or sight.

Bob wanted his part and his share of the profits, and Renie was being made miserable because she wouldn't help him put over the dirty deal.

And yet, what if it were true that he wasn't getting his stuff across? John knew only too well that age had power to dull that sixth sense whereby an actor *feels* his audience —knows when interest lags — even as it dulls the other five senses.

He had seen old actors, great in their day, bellow and muff, and lose points; pathetic old fellows who died in the heart-broken belief that only the jealousy of young actors had crowded them out.

When John's music cue came there was a cold lump in the pit of his stomach. Beads of perspiration stood on his brow, and his hands shook visibly. There was no denying it; he had no control. A woman laughed in his big scene. Titters broke out all over the house. Someone shushed them. And the audi-

ence, always tensed in the theatre, burst into uproarious laughter.

God! The agony of that moment. He was overwhelmed by the greatest shame that can come to a dramatic actor; the one ugly experience about which he can never afterward joke: an audience laughing outrageously throughout a dramatic scene.

John Hudson left the theatre a broken old man. An actor whose soul had been stripped and beaten in public. He was through. And his great ambition had been to die—on the stage. That was where an actor should die. Where many had died. Yet rarely had one stopped the show for that purpose.

AN omnibus turned in through the gate of Stonewall Jackson Camp. "The Crew" alighted and the bus backed out.

"How's your bill?" Timidly, John addressed a passing stage hand.

"Pretty fair. Cuppla singin' ac's, some singles an' a sketch. Maggie Moore an' Tom Darrow's the headliner," replied the man cheerily.

"I know their act. Was on the bill with 'em two years ago in K. C.," said John. But the man had passed on. Nobody had any time for has-beens.

John dropped on the backless plank seat. Presently, another bus rolled in. The old men patiently waiting on the cottage verandas adjusted their spectacles as the Keith performers began climbing out. John started up. A lean man of forty-five or so had jumped to the driveway and, with an Indian yell, had begun straddling benches toward John.

John had expected that there might be somebody on the bill besides Tom and Maggie — he had played the circuit so long—and one was always running into somebody in the "show business." But Jerry Blake!

"Johnnie Hudson! You blankety-blank ol' humbug!" shouted Blake, as their hands leaped together. "What t' 'ell you doin' here? And in that make-up!" indicating John's uniform.

"My God, Jerry!" was all John could find voice to say.

John Hudson and Jerry Blake had parted in bitterness four years ago. Yet here they stood, hand gripping hand, lips smiling, eyes misted. Of such froth is stage enmities. Yesterday sinks into vagueness starred only with sentimental incident. Today, often difficult, is, nevertheless, colorful; while tomorrow, a prismatic promise, is just over the hill.

"Come on, you old scalawag, and meet the bunch." Jerry, hooking his arm through John's, was dragging him toward the drive. "I'm doin' a single in brass on the bill. Five instruments. Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to know my old crony, Mr. John Hudson, an old-timer in the business."

"Why, Mr. Hudson!" Maggie Moore, slim and suspiciously brassy of hair, dropped a large suitcase to fling her arms around John's neck. "You darling!"

John's acquaintance with Maggie had extended over one week. But friendships are formed swiftly on the stage, where life shifts rapidly. Maggie and Renie had become pals and Maggie had made a great fuss over John. Her act, "Old Days in Dixie," was a top-liner, but she was without "side." John embraced her, his face rueful. "I know I'm old when pretty girls hug me in public," he chuckled.

They all came up and shook hands, accepting him as one of themselves, talking shop in professional jargon. John glowed.

"Maggie, where's Tom?" he asked.

"Oh, Tommie didn't make the grade for the free bus Mr. Bloom had at the theatre for us at one-thirty. Trust little me to get it."

"Yes, Maggie needs the money," cut in a bobbed-haired girl whose jazz dancing act, following Maggie's act, had been killed at both performances on Monday. And the house manager wouldn't change her place on the bill. "Who said this was the age of pep? They haven't followed Old Lang Syne on the bill," complained the bobbed-haired girl.

Maggie laughed. She could afford to.

"Say, you ought-a be an acrobat," said a small, muscular woman bitterly as she fished her suitcase from a pile of hand luggage. "Spend your life training. Always in a bad spot. Work harder than anybody on the bill, and any rotten act that finishes with a song about Dear Old Mother takes a dozen curtains, while you're lucky if you get three."

Maggie's eyes followed her sympathetically. "Ain't it the truth?" she sighed. "Say, I was on the bill with Renie last month in Cincy."

"How is she?" asked John eagerly.

"Not so good. Her an' Bob's fightin' somethin' fierce. She's not puttin' her stuff over like when you was with her. No support. Listen, why don't you write to Renie? She told me you walked out on her, left a note sayin' you was goin' to The Actors' Home, but her letter to you was returned."

Swift color flamed in John's face and he drew a deep sigh of relief. He might have known Renie had written. But he had left no forwarding address when he beat it from the Actor's Home. He must be getting old, sure enough, to have forgotten a thing like that.

"Come on, the customers 'll be arrivin' soon," called Jerry, leading off to the rear of the stage where two large tents had been set up on the lawn for dressing-rooms.

The men straggled in, gay, careless and friendly, stripped to the waist, and began making-up on boxes and suitcases, reminiscing pleasurably of lean days when they had done this on the "tall grass time."

Um-m, but it was good to hear the banter, the little bursts of song. And that growing, heartening buzz of the arriving audience! How the memories crowded!

John loved every rough angle of the game. The crude back-stage sights—stacks of scenery ready to trip one at every step, the sickishly sweet smells, the electric tension underlying casualty—the lifting of the heart as the clarion cry rang out: "Clear! First act!" Then the slow, grating rise of the curtain.

Always a new town. A new adventure. John felt the rush of blood in his veins. This was the life. Then a sense of all things finished, save suffering, flooded him. It was unthinkable that all these people, his people, must go out of his life after the matinee. Another performance out here would likely not happen again. And he—even if Renie and Bob should part—a has-been might come back in the other places of life—but not in the theatre. There was no way of recovering worn-out nerves, shattered control. He would never dare face an audience again.

"I say, Johnnie," Jerry was saying, "how'd you happen to drift here?"

"Had to have chow and a place to bunk," said John simply.

"Why don't you go to the Actors' Home?" asked a fat monologist, intent on giving a devilish tilt to his eyebrows.

"Did. Couldn't stand it. Always

talkin' 'bout what they *had been,*" John grinned. "So I hoofed it and went to sellin' pencils and needles."

"My God!" exclaimed a "blackface" as he adjusted his celluloid collar.

"Why don't you hook up with a show?" asked Jerry, carefully covering the gray hair at his temples.

"Business bad. Had to have something quick," replied John evasively. He felt no embarrassment over publicly discussing his financial troubles. They had all been in the same boat at one time or another. But professional failure—that was the unforgivable sin of an actor among actors.

He added hurriedly: "I lasted two weeks as a back-door salesman. Havin' been hungry for the first time, I let a lady take me in one mornin', feed me, quiz me, and when she found out I'd been in the Civil War, she never rested till she got me in here. And I was ripe by that time for anything that promised three squares a day."

"Don't these old boys get your goat gabbin' 'bout the old days?"

"Well, it's different. They don't talk about the theatre. Sometimes I get fed up with 'em like you will; then I hop out under the trees and put me on a vod'ville show of my own. Trouble is, my stuff's over the heads of my audience."

He spoke with the light self-assurance of the actor who knows himself to be good. As a matter of fact, the want of appreciation of his aged audience was a sore point with him. An audience was an audience. And it was John's belief that *the audience knows.* He had lost that indefinable something which is the power to "put it over," and which often enables an actor to make a bad act "go" while a good act will fall flat in the hands of one lacking it.

"But, man alive! What-a you do nights?" demanded Jerry. "Don't tell me you *sleep!*" Clearly, such a notion was preposterous to him.

"No, I lie in the dark, sometimes troupin', sometimes in the theatre, maybe countin' up the receipts. Business always good for my show," John grinned.

Maggie Moore burst into the men's tent without regard for their presentability and slumped down on an empty suitcase. "My God!"

"What's the matter?" everybody asked at once.

"Tom!" she gasped. "He was late an' I sent one of the boys to phone his hotel. Couldn't rouse him an' a bellboy went up an' found him in a stupor, like he was doped. Bad whisky. I warned him, too."

The racketing of the overture cut across the shocked silence.

And now, a hubbub broke out. Not the matter of Tom's slip from the path of rectitude, nor consideration for the laws of the country, had caused that moment of shocked paralysis, but the thing that is always foremost in the actor's mind—ahead of law and order, ahead of moral consciousness, ahead of physical pain or mental anguish; which denies even the prior rights of death—the supreme urge of the show.

"You can't leave out the headliner without a word," said the monologist in a flat voice. "The old man's been playin' it up like a million dollars."

"Might announce that Tom's sick," suggested John feebly.

"You know as well as we do, Johnny, that when the public's been *promised* a certain act nothin' but death will appease 'em," said Jerry. No matter how many good acts you got on the bill, if the audience expects to see one act and it don't show up, they go away and say the bill was rotten."

Mr. Bloom waddled into the tent.

"Gott! but this iss a fine business. What for should I do all this, boys, if it wasn't good advertisin' when my business was fallin' off, ain't it?" He was almost crying. "Advertise, iss it? An' my big act falls down on me! What for should that big bummer take it into his head to get drunk today, I ask you? I wish to God he dies, then I can get headlines in the papers."

Nobody thought of Mr. Bloom as brutal. They understood. An actor had no right to kill the show—not even by dying before the performance. That Tom Darrow was not in the habit of drinking to excess in no sense mitigated his sin. That he might actually be dying as the result of bad liquor they did not consider. They were primarily concerned over the show.

THE performance had unexpectedly, even to Mr. Bloom, taken on the importance of a society event, and cars from Alexandria, even from Washington, had been arriving all morning. Now, a multitude of voices were droning beneath the trees outside.

And every fluttering program promised:

"OLD DAYS IN DIXIE

An act that will transport the old back to their forgotten youth, and make the young sigh for the beautiful past."

The orchestra had crashed to a close. The first act was on.

John's mind leaped backward, and he thought of the time an actor had missed a train, or some booze-fighter had come to the theatre unfit to go on. A quick call.

"Everybody on stage. Bill, you gotta double Jim's part. Here, we'll run this scene." Or, "Folks, we gotta cut the part. I'll take this line, and you take——"

Then he saw a great audience laughing—not with him, but at him. John Hudson turned sick. But the showman in the bone and fibre of him swept aside every other consideration. Maggie sobbing forlornly; Tom stupefied in his hotel; himself. Yet nothing mattered but the show.

"Jerry," he said weakly, "my dress suit's in my trunk over in Picket Cottage. Pretty wrinkled, I guess, but——" His voice trailed off.

Jerry was already out of the tent. Maggie understood, too. Leaping up, she flung her arms around him. "Why didn't I think of it in the first place?" she cried.

"I know Maggie's act," John was explaining to the gaping Mr. Bloom. "Them old-fashioned dances is my speed. Useter do specialty dances with my own show in the days when you had to give 'em somethin' besides music between the acts. We can fake the patter."

THE music. The make-up. Seven thousand pairs of eyes focused on John Hudson. Seven thousand minds knew in advance that he was going to be good. And abruptly, he knew, it, too. Maggie, knowing that an old-time actor never fails in a pinch, let him take the lead.

They improvised, step by step, the serious old dances, like blown autumn leaves in sweet sorrow for the dead spring, lightened by humorous inspirations. Mistakes were covered by an exaggerated air of annoyance that made them appear a part of the act. The applause was like wine to John.

And when, after ten curtain calls Maggie pushed him out to make a speech, after whispering to him that she was going to "can" old Tom and wanted him to go on with the act, John, with that assumption of excessive modesty, which is the favorite pose of a star when making a

speech, came down onto the apron of the stage.

"Rescued from the discard!" was the song in John's heart.

If he had been other than he was, he might have paused to consider that he had been rescued by an amazing piece of luck. And Luck, being proverbially a fickle jade, might desert him as suddenly as she had found him.

But an actor's whole being is founded on luck. His gift is a piece of luck. Then, he gets nowhere, however he may perfect his art, unless he has the luck to be seen by the right people—the right people being curiously determined not to see him. He lives on the vicarious promise of luck. Always expecting it, he takes it, when it arrives, as matter-of-coursely, as meeting old friends on Broadway, or on every bill.

When John strutted into the wings he found Maggie in conversation with Mr. Bloom, who, in addition to managing the Richmond House, controlled forty weeks of "Time," which Maggie wanted.

"Give that bummer, Tom Darrow, the gate, an' you get that 'time,'" Mr. Bloom was saying. "I got heart failure by that man. I don't like him nohow. Mr. Hudson here, he is a better performer anyways, ain't it?" He patted John affectionately on the back.

Maggie, equally sore and anxious for the "time," was in full agreement with Mr. Bloom. Tom had been getting cocky anyhow of late. Always threatening to go to his rich kin who wanted him. Well, let him.

With a lifting of the heart, such as he had not known in over a year, John turned toward the tent. Performers slapped him on the back as he passed. They all worshiped success.

He was just about to step from the stage when his eyes fell on an old man huddled on a pile of grass mats, his head in his hands. Tom Darrow, finally aroused and shocked into sobriety upon learning the time of day, had rushed upon the stage just as John and Maggie were finishing the act.

IN the week that followed, John practically lived in the theatre; rehearsing mornings, and watching the act afternoons and evenings. He was to go on to the next stand with the act, to be ready when Tom had finished his two weeks.

Meanwhile, some disturbing facts came out about Tom. His rich kin were a figment of his fancy. He hadn't anybody. Also, with the improvidence of the actor, he had nothing saved. He would have to get something to do at once. He confided the facts to John with an air of cheerfulness which John knew he did not feel. Old actors did not get something at once.

He was sorry for Tom; but self-preservation was the first law of life. He couldn't help it if Tom had nobody and nothing. Why, if he were to get soft and turn this chance down—chances came seldom to the old—he might actually die in an Old Soldiers' Home. They died out there on an average of one a day. So much feebleness and death was enough to make a man die out of time.

If only Tom had somebody. He himself had Renie. She was sure to send for him when she and Bob split, as Maggie said they were about to do; but those things held on indefinitely—he might die in the meantime. And a man who didn't look out for Number One was a fool.

John had continued to stay at the Home, "to save expense," as he told Maggie when she offered him an advance. The truth of the matter was

that John was reveling in a new prestige among the "old fellows." But no matter how early he reached the theatre, Tom was there. He reminded John of a man hanging over a corpse. He looked feeble, too, these last few days.

Well, luck was like that; deserting one, turning unexpectedly to another. It was life. Trouble with actors, they were too sympathetic. Reason they never had anything. Good job he wasn't. All the softness had been dried up in him by loneliness and despair. Nobody took pity on him. Now luck had turned his way. Not because anybody had thought of him, but because luck had decreed it so.

And, when all was said and done, he was a better dancer and a better actor than Tom. Besides, wasn't he pulling in forty weeks' time for Maggie? He was no fool, if he *was* an actor. And hard as nails. Tom could stand to die in a "Home" as well as he could. Poor devil!

It was a fact that Tom wasn't a soak. Bad liquor. Bad luck. If he had anybody at all—why didn't he have a grandchild? It was every man's duty to have a grandchild. No sympathy for a man who had acquired no responsibilities.

It was Saturday afternoon. Tom was making up for the Saturday matinee. John sat in his dressing-room. These last performances he had hung around Tom like a mother hovering over a sick child. He refrained by a great effort from asking Tom about his plans for the future.

But the question nagged John and the Actors' Home kept recurring in his thoughts. Recollecting his own experience, John shuddered. Not that the Home was a bad place. . . . but always to be surrounded by has-beens. Has-been soldiers were less humiliating companions. For, after all, a young man might be that. Merely meant a war was over. But to be reminded every minute that one's youth was past, one's hope dead. . . .

"Were you in the Civil War, Tom?" asked John casually.

"No." Tom was rubbing thick grease paint into his wrinkles.

John meditated. Well, why not? Old enough. Ought to have been on one side or the other. Maybe exempt as a family man. But that would mean Tom was even older than himself. There'd been no exemptions in the South. But of course Tom was a Yankee.

"Ever have any children?" asked John.

"Yes. Two. Both dead. Got two grandchildren. Boy and girl. Both married."

"In the business?"

"No, thank God."

John breathed a sigh of relief. Two grandchildren not in the business meant two homes somewhere. "Seen 'em lately?" still casually.

"No. You know how it is. Young folks don't want to be bothered with the old. As much as told me so last time I saw 'em. I don't pester 'em with my worries."

Rising abruptly, John walked out of Tom's dressing-room. He didn't want to be pestered, either. The truckman had arrived with his trunk. John directed him to set it against the back of the stage, paid for it and left the theatre.

When he returned the matinee was over. He sat down on his trunk in the darkness. Was still sitting there when the stage hands began straggling in for the evening performance. Presently the dark vacuum began taking on life. Lights. Gay voices. Slamming doors. Bits of song.

John saw Maggie go to her dressing-room. Still he did not move. He lost track of time. He wasn't

thinking. His mind was a jumble of inarticulate things. The "bill" was moving forward. Good-bys were heard every few minutes as act after act finished. Friendships had been formed during this past week that would last a lifetime—to be renewed briefly year after year. Some of them would never meet again. They were sorry to part. Glad to move on. Would be glad to get back another day. They called good-by to John. "See you in——"

When the act preceding "Old Days In Dixie" began with a blare of brass, John seemed suddenly to come awake. He slid off his trunk and made his way to Maggie's dressing-room. Grandchildren were ungrateful. Could anything be worse? Maggie was engaged in the delicate process of "beading" her lashes. "Sit down, Daddy John. Be through in a minute," she said.

John limped over to her hat trunk and sat down with a groan. "Maggie," he said, "I got a touch of rheumatism. I haven't been square with you. Sometimes I'm down for days."

Maggie set her cosmetic pan on the shelf and, turning, gave him a searching look. "It don't pay to be soft in this world, Daddy John," she said. "I'm sorry for him, too, because he's old. But you've signed with me and on the strength of it I've got Bloom's backing. I've been after it for a long time. I'm not a fool, if you are."

"I wonder how many times you've divided your last fifty cents with a hungry room-mate and gone to the Automat for your dinner, Maggie?"

Maggie turned back to her make-up shelf.

"I coulda done it if he hadn't told me about his grandchildren," continued John apologetically.

Maggie completed her eyes before she spoke. "I get you, Daddy John." She sighed deeply. "Well—as for Bloom—the dickens with his 'time!' I don't need it. An' you got Renie." She reached into her bosom, extracted a bill which she folded small and handed to John. "For one performance," she said.

He shook his head. "I was glad to help you out."

But she pushed it into his pocket. "There's my call. Good-by, Johnny Hudson. See you next season in your old act maybe."

She rushed out into the wings. The orchestra was beginning her music. "Where's Tom?" she hissed in a whisper that carried all over the big stage.

A stage hand and two or three performers were already rushing down the stairs toward Tom's basement dressing-room, calling, "Tom Darrow!" in the enormous whisper peculiar to back stage.

Doors began opening in the basement. Men and women appearing in various states of undress and make-up.

Somebody knocked on Tom's door. Pushed it open. Dark. . . . Quick light. . . . Empty. . . .

"He's not in." The words were caught up and carried from lip to lip up the stair and across the stage to Maggie faster than feet could travel back to her.

"Not in! Tom Darrow's not in. . . ."

The stage manager without a moment's delay signaled the musicians with lights and by changing the announcement against the proscenium. "Old Days in Dixie" disappeared. "Barney & Co." took its place—a dancing and singing act to be done "in one"; which is to say, on the apron of the stage, since there was no time to change Maggie's big, elaborate set.

Almost without break the musicians changed from the sentimental melody to rip-roaring jazz. The curtain lifted. A drop curtain hid

Maggie's set. At sound of their music "Barney & Co." needed no words to tell them something had gone wrong with the bill and that they were being pushed on. They came running, the girl pulling her dress over her head as she ran, and bounded on the stage.

"Daddy John!" Maggie caught him in the alley that led to the street. "Come back. Get into Tom's clothes. You won't have time to open your trunk." She had him by the arm, dragging him back. "Tom's not in."

He broke away from her, ran in and across the stage like a boy. Down the steps three at a time. In exactly seven minutes by Maggie's time he was back upstairs in Tom's clothes, sans makeup.

"Barney & Co.," being a twelve-minute act, looked uneasily into the wings for a signal to continue if necessary. They saw Tom and Maggie waiting and bounded off the stage.

"Old Days in Dixie" dropped into place against the proscenium, the music grew dreamy. The curtain lifted.

Maggie was in John's arms for their waltzing entrance from the wings just as Tom Darrow lurched through the stage door. The actor had brought him to the theatre. He looked about in blinking befuddlement and sat down on the doorman's stool.

"Forty weeks more for you and me, Young John," whispered Maggie as they whirled out of the dimness into the blaze of light.

"Forty years more for me," replied John. Adding, with a twinkle of his youthful blue eyes, "Young John's right."

And the audience watched a pretty girl and a stately old man dancing a dainty minuet, unaware that it looked upon an actor risen from the grave.

The Right Arm of Charlemagne

The Legend of the Cover Design

NO EARTHLY power could control it. It was the true manifestation of its owner's character. When he did a noble deed, the silver shield grew brighter. With baser deeds, the shield grew dim. Only when the knight surpassed himself and all others in the greatness of his service did the golden star shine forth from the center of his magic shield. Great honor was his.

The Right Arm of Charlemagne carried such a shield.

With the clanging of armor, the snorting of horses, the shouts and turmoil of preparation, the knights of Charlemagne were arraying for battle. In their midst none was more expectant nor visioned greater deeds of valor than a handsome, magnificently built youth, on the verge of his first blow at the enemy. It was the beginning of life to him. Eager, chafingly impatient, he awaited the signal.

But his hopes crashed to the earth! He was chosen to remain at the castle to guard the gate!

Bitterly disappointed, resentful and sullen, he watched the others depart to glorious opportunity.

As the hours passed, he reasoned with himself until, half ashamed, he gained control of his feelings. Then did he watch the gate faithfully, in spite of the witchcraft of the enemy who appeared as an old woman, begging shelter, sneering at him for cowardice at staying home from battle; then, as a little old man, offering a magic sword with which he was told to rush to the rescue of his lord, who was in sore straits. These and many other temptations did he withstand until Charlemagne returned, victorious.

A great shout arose from the host, for from the center of the shield of the young knight shone the golden star. He had conquered more than his enemy—he had conquered himself.

This youth was Roland, whose courage and marvelous deeds of arms soon won him the name of the "The Right Arm of Charlemagne."

FRED. T. EVERETT.

Thaw

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

A LITTLE powdery flurry of snow descended not unpleasantly upon man, horse and sleigh. Here, in the depths of the forest road, the wind could not reach, and there was a sense of sheer comfort.

Scones liked comfort. He took a sensuous joy in the feel of his fur coat, in the warmth and ease of his flexible high boots, in the soothing influence of his tobacco and his favorite pipe.

Standing now, for a moment, on the empty, slow-moving sleigh, he reached for his pouch and refilled the pipe. Sheltering a lit match with his capacious hands, he applied it to the tobacco.

At that instant the off horse stumbled. The flame bit into Scones' flesh. With an oath he tossed the offending match away, managing at the same time clumsily to knock his pipe from his mouth. Its amber stem shattered on the floor of the sleigh.

Uttering an inarticulate cry, Scones leaped for the whip and proceeded to take his rage out upon the off horse. Sawing at the bit with the reins, lustful cruelty nerved his arm to lay the heavy whip mercilessly upon the plunging animal. Tired at last, and his lust slaked, he set the quivering team in motion and relapsed into thought.

Dusk was coming on. He could picture the bleak farmhouse that was his standing there in the lonely clearing. The fires would be out. There would be no steaming meal awaiting him.

Much as she often irritated him, Aunt Hannah had been an asset. Fires for warmth and fires for food; clean linen and an immaculate house —she had given him these.

If only she had not been such a trembling old fool, rousing in him every ounce of the Old Nick. Cringing helplessness always stirred the devil in him. She was only a shadow when she left the earth; but a useful shadow, he admitted. He missed her and the comforts she provided. Never mind! Never mind! That would soon be remedied now!

The snow had ceased falling. Scones could see the end of the forest road. It was banded across with a broad streak of orange light. Against the orange light a figure grew, silhouetted. Scones cursed and then laughed. Old Andy Rimmer, on snowshoes. Must have been up visiting Aunt Hannah's grave. Twice a week in life he had visited her regularly, and now after her death he kept up his habit. Snowshoed up the long, weary miles from Bartonville.

Poor old fools, billing and cooing at the end of wasted lives! Scones could remember dimly Aunt Hannah's husband—a dissolute rascal—why she'd ever married him no one knew, with steady-going Andy remaining a bachelor all his life because of her, and standing by her through the troubles she brought on herself.

"Hullo, Andy!"

Scones brought the team to a halt. Rimmer was right under the horses' noses now. There was always a challenge in Andy Rimmer's eyes when they met those of Scones. But Scones won out, crushing down with scorn the sensitive, pale blue, red-rimmed orbs of old Andy.

"Been up to see the old lady?"

Couldn't help it, Scones couldn't! The old chap looked so helpless there, and at the same time so defiant, you just couldn't help twisting the screws a bit! He stood there now, with the moth-eaten sweater Hannah had knit him bulking out his ancient coat, the whole held in by a corded sash, as his baggy gray trousers were tied under the knees with red strips, betraying the leanness of his limbs.

"No," said Andy slowly at last, "been up to see you."

"Oh!"

Andy came forward and stood by the sleigh.

"I kind of—wanted to talk to you."

"Nice of you, Andy. About what?"

"About—Linda!"

Scones' lip curled a little. He sensed what was coming and braced himself for it.

"Well?"

"You aim to go ahead and get married?"

"I do, Andy. Week from today!"

Rimmer put his mittened hand on the sleigh. Scones could see it shaking. Andy's face was pallid.

"You—you love Linda?"

Scones' lip curled again.

"You're too inquisitive. But if you must know, I do. What do you think I am?"

Andy's little form tensed. And suddenly his eyes flashed up at Scones as the latter had seldom seen them.

"I know one thing you ain't, Scones. You ain't the type of man that ever should marry, 'specially a sensitive girl like Linda."

Scones' hands clutched inside his gloves. For want of better action he picked up the heavy whip and idly flecked the flanks of the horses.

"If you have anything special on your mind, Andy, out with it. I want to get home."

"I have," said Rimmer heavily. "And maybe it won't make nice tellin', or nice hearin'. What if I told you I knew a boy who was expelled from school for torturin' a cat in the schoolyard? What if I told you I knew a man who beat a dog to

death with a shovel just because he tore a pant's leg in play?"

"Who told you that? Did that—that——"

Andy moved a step nearer.

"Careful!" he said grimly. "I'm an old man, but if you speak of her that's dead—by heavens——"

Scones laughed.

"Keep your wool on, Andy! But, see here, if you believe all that stuff why don't you tell—her? Why don't you warn Linda of the awful man she's about to marry?"

Andy said slowly: "There was Forde that Hannah married. People told her about him. I could have, too, but my lips was tied. Others told her. That only made her all the stronger for him. Girls is queer when they think they're in love!"

"Think? What d'ye mean?"

Rimmer did not answer at once. Growing dusk shut in about them. Forest silence enfolded them, broken only by the impatient movement of the horses and the faint clang of the sleigh-bells.

"I mean," said Rimmer at last, "if she knew you—she'd not love you. I mean," his voice rose uncertainly, "I mean you've got to give her up, that's what! You've got to give her up or I'll bring a charge against you——"

"A charge?"

"Of sending Hannah to her grave!"

NOW what did old Rimmer mean standing there saying that? How much did he suspect? A thread in the fabric of Scones' assurance snapped. Like most bullies, he was a coward.

Old Andy said doggedly: "She's in her grave and I was figurin' to leave her in peace. She didn't have no peace on earth, and I wasn't aimin' to trouble her sperrit bringin' up bygones now she's passed on. It warn't in her to strike back. Otherwise I reckon even now you'd have her sperrit hangin' round hauntin' your place there o' nights, cursin' of you."

Scones shivered in his fur coat. Spirits, hauntings, were all tomfoolery, poppycock! Then why did he shiver? Old Andy was like a ghost himself there, a ghostly accuser in the late night. With a sudden intense desire to be gone, Scones clucked to the horses.

"No!" cried Andy, making a grab for the reins. "No, by heavens, you don't get off until you hear me! You promise me you'll break with Linda, or I'll tell 'em all. I aimed to leave Hannah in peace in the grave, but she'll not mind. She liked Linda, Hannah did. I'll tell her plump and plain, and I'll tell everybody I meet that you hounded Hannah to her grave!

"Don't think because she kep' silence I've not guessed your petty, mean tricks! I've seen fear of her life in her eyes, though her tongue said nothin' of it! I reckon you'd 'a' killed her another way if you hadn't fancied slow torture instead, playin' on her sensitive sperrit.

"And it'd be the same with Linda, if you got her under your roof. She's all wrapped up just now with your slick ways and your devil's good looks—but she'd learn different first night she shared your home. You'd murder her, too!"

"Murder?" Scones' face purpled. "That's an ugly word. I—I never laid hands on Aunt Hannah."

"No, maybe not. If ye had I'd 'a' bust you open myself. I'd 'a' done it anyways if she hadn't made me promise to lay off you. But some day you'll have murder on your soul of the other kind—done with a spade, maybe like you killed the dog!"

Old Andy's voice shrilled through the frosty air. "There's murder in you, and it'll come out! You'd murder Linda, that's what you'd do. I know you. It's in you, and it'll come out! Hannah was old; you could kill her like you did the cat, with slow torture. Linda's young; you'd not be able to wait for old age and helplessness—it'd be the spade——"

Silly old fool! You made allowances for fools—when they were old. The whip in Scones' hand was heavy. It balanced nicely. He had broken animals with the heavy end. Through the gap in the western clouds, late sunlight streamed unexpectedly, filling the forest road with a red light. Red, to match the thing inside Scones! That old fool babbling on there . . .

"Let go those reins!"

"Your promise, Scones!"

Promise? Old fool! Red in the forest, red in his heart. . . . red on the whip handle, and a little patch oozing from old Andy Rimmer's head where it lay against the crimsoning snow.

YOU had to think quickly at a time like this. Quickly because daylight was dying fast. Quickly because your coward spirit was waning, too. Was the old man dead? He could not be sure, lacking calmness to investigate. Better if he was . . .

Well, old Andy had come up to visit Aunt Hannah's grave. Coming back on snowshoes, he had struck into the forest—perhaps after the trail of a forest creature, a hobby of his. Old Andy had evidently tripped, struck his head, and . . . frozen to death. It would be a cold night tonight! He, Scones, had passed him part way, and exchanged greetings. The story would hold—if . . .

Scones quickly removed the victim's snowshoes, put them on himself, lifted the body and struck into the woods. Calculating the remaining daylight carefully, he laboriously threaded his way through the underbrush and chose a suitable place for the "accident." The victim now being invested with his snowshoes again, Scones dabbed a projecting branch with blood and considered his own return. Any marks he had made at the "scene of the accident" he had swept over with his arm; the confusion of Andy's "fall" would cover that.

Removing his heavy boots, he painfully commenced the backward journey. The surface snow being wet, the snowshoes had bitten deeply with the double burden, and formed hard imprints quite capable of bearing Scones' weight. His stockinged feet made scarcely an impression, certainly none to attract any but miscroscopic attention. Thrice he carefully had to cover red marks on the snow.

Returned to the team, he was faced with a larger task. Backing his sleigh up in the original ruts, he took the shovel he carried and obliterated all signs with infinite care, except the snowshoe tracks where, from just ahead, he had broken the trail into the forest.

Even here, luck was with him. Starting, as he had carefully done in carrying the body, from original tracks on the roadway, he had plunged directly into the deeper snow off the beaten way; the sinking of the snowshoe marks—due to his double burden—was easily accounted for by the deeper, softer snow.

A little wind, finding its way along the road, aided him now, sifting over his rather too obvious obliterations. Working backward to the horses, he climbed to the shaft, and from there drew his shovel over his final footprints, and the little wind, following, helped him.

No one, he felt sure, would know —certainly if the wind held for ten minutes more—that here the team had stopped, that here murder had been done. As for the snowshoe marks, they were deep, definite, distinctive; sanded over by drifting snow on the roadway, they would yet remain as a trail into the forest.

The necessity for this careful and prompt action, the urge of self-preservation, had sustained him thus far; now, urging the horses forward, he felt a numbed sense of unreality.

Had all this really happened? The forest road, deserted save for himself and the patient team of horses, was silent, peaceful, hushed with night.

And then, suddenly, he felt intensely cold. Was it fear? He told himself "No!" With the sunset the weather had turned suddenly colder, that was all. His breath was like smoke in his nostris; hoar frost began to paint a white bib under his chin, and to beard the plodding horses. Better so. It removed the one uncertainty. If old Andy Rimmer were not really dead, what chance had he now? If he came to in time, he would flounder dazed and lost in the dark forest.

And cold like this was a relentless enemy. Even with activity to circulate the blood, it would overtake a man before long. And an old man's blood was sluggish. No, no—the thing was certain enough! By now old Andy's "sperrit" had gone flirting after Hannah's.

This conceit made Scones laugh. Perhaps Andy would induce the gentle Hannah's spirit to come and curse his dwelling. He laughed again, loudly, with bravado, but not liking the echoes in the still, cold, dusky air, he fell quickly silent again.

SIX inches of snow fell in the night. Scones, rising from uncomfortable dreams, took fresh heart at sight of it. His precautions of last evening, which might have slipped somewhere, were now buttressed by this bounty of nature.

White, virgin snow, inches deep! Its gentle fall had laden the branches of the trees; like brides the evergreens stood, dazzlingly beautiful in the morning sunshine. Like brides! Like Linda!

A murderer—joining himself with a simple, spotless bride like that? If any such thoughts came, he stifled them quickly. Linda was a simple girl all right; accepted him at his face value; gave him a loyalty not easily to be shaken. She was versed in housewifery, she was used to a farm; his house, his stock, his creature comforts would be safe in her hands. . . .

"You'd murder Linda, that's what you'd do. I know you. It's in you, and it'll come out! Hannah was old —you could kill her like you did the cat — with slow torture. Linda's young—you'd not be able to wait for old age and helplessness—it'd be the spade——"

Burned into his memory, those words! Bah! Nonsense! He loved Linda, Scones told himself. Did he? To join himself, a murderer, to her without a qualm? Well, desired her, then. Wanted to have her here to himself, in this lonely farmhouse; to possess her, body and soul. . . .

He hitched up the team and went to Bartonville. He dreaded, en route, lest traces of last night's affair should still be there, but the snowfall had done its work. Not even by the trees could he trace the spot. Uneasiness returned as he neared the town. What if, by any chance, someone had passed by last night, seen the trail and followed? Why should they? But things happened

that way sometimes. What if, after all, a murderer's terror had made him assess old Andy's injury too highly? What if Andy recovered and fumbled his way out?

He reached the market square, tied up his beasts, and mingled with the activity of the place.

"Say, have you seen anything of old Andy Rimmer? He went up your way yesterday, but he ain't showed up since!"

When at last the question came, Scones, who had been hearing it often in imagination, felt his skin prickle. But he managed a casual:

"Why sure, he was up visiting Auntie's grave. I passed him on my way home with the team. He was plodding back on snowshoes, same as usual."

"Whereabouts?"

"Why, it couldn't 'a' been far this side of my place. As I remember he hadn't got far along the forest road." That was true, and it gave the whole distance to get lost in!

"You spoke to him?"

"Sure. We passed the time of day. I wanted him to come back with me and sleep. It's quite a chore for an old chap like that to make all that distance, and he looked pretty done in. But he'd not hear of it, so he went trudging on. You don't mean to say he ain't turned up?"

"Not yet. The Widow Norris, where he stays, figgered he might be staying up to your place."

"Good Lord!" said Scones.

"You didn't see nothing coming in this morning?"

"Snowfall!" replied Scones succinctly. "Otherwise I'd 'a' seen his tracks if he turned off anywhere or got into trouble. Might 'a' got following up some animal trail—you know he's bug that way. Look here, you get the boys together, and I'll take 'em on my team, and we'll beat the bush!"

That was a bold move. And yet—Scones pictured the little declivity where he had staged the "accident." The snowfall would have completed the burial. Small chance of finding the body, and, if they did, no suspicion would fall on him. He labored more diligently than any, directing the forces, refusing to give up until nightfall cloaked the forest.

"I never was a real favorite of his," Scones told the defeated searchers, as he drove back to Bartonville. "But he was next door to an uncle to me and Linda both. It'll cast kind of a gloom over the wedding! He may turn up yet, but it don't look any too good. I've kept telling old Andy he shouldn't go roaming the woods alone at his age!"

Turn up? Yes, maybe in the springtime, when the snow melted, and the rills ran, and the forest came to life. But more likely not. If the burial of the snow be not too deep there were forest creatures, hungry with the winter, gaunt beasts that slunk in the shadows sometimes when you drove the forest ways at night.

Scones shivered, but deep within was a warmth of assurance that all was well. Parting from his comrades, he drove to Linda's house to bring her news and affectionate comfort, and to arrange with Tim, her brother, for the moving of such household goods as she would bring with her to the farm.

TIM came on snowshoes the day before the wedding. Scones held no particular liking for the lad, but Linda's brother, along with the rest of her family, must have at least temporary consideration. After the wedding? Well, Linda would be his then, and he'd have as little as need be to do with them all.

There was a sweet reasonableness about their family life that irked

him terribly. Their bit of farm lay just under the eaves of the town, as it were, quite as though snuggling in for protection. Softies, he decided! And the family a bit pampered. Even Linda was inclined to be soft.

He went about his tasks now and thought of this. His own farm looked hard and desolate enough. Across the sky today a low wrack of clouds scudded before a soft south wind. A quick thaw had come. You might almost think it was spring.

Melting snow dripped from the eaves and trees; rivulets formed themselves in the rutted snow of the driveway. Spring? Not by a long way. A protracted cold spell ahead yet.

He grinned, wondering how Linda would stand it here. Well, by spring he'd have her broken to it. What did he mean? What made his mouth tighten that way, and the blood pump a little more quickly in his veins?

He remembered once buying a horse that had been a family pet. A sugared, pampered pet, full of tricks and whims, not suited to work on his farm. He recalled with satisfaction how he had broken that animal to hard work. He'd brought more than one such creature to heel. And now he'd try his hand with a woman. Scones licked lips that had suddenly gone dry as his ears rang with the words . . . "You didn't count Aunt Hannah; she hadn't enough spirit really to break."

It was at this moment that Tim came up over the sky-line. Scones recognized him at that distance, and smiled his scorn. Another softie. Another soft young fool!

"Linda sent me over to get your team. She's got her stuff ready, and she said to borrow your team and bring it over!"

Scones' eyes narrowed. Linda was taking something for granted there! As if she owned his team already.

"What's the matter with your teams?"

"All busy—getting ready, you know!" Tim smiled; something in that smile, some smug assurance, some family pride, an intangible defiance, almost a suspicion, made Scones bristle like an angry dog. But he kept to his plan of playing safe until he had the girl.

"All right. I'll help you harness them!"

They sloshed together through the wet snow in the yard.

"Quite a thaw! Almost think the spring break-up was here, eh?" said Tim.

Scones grunted. He had no desire for conversation. The spring break-up! He'd been fighting against the influence of this soft weather all day. The spring break-up! He saw the grip of the frost loosened on roadway and forest. And he wondered if, after all, the winter wouldn't give up its dead when that came; if even now the recent snow wouldn't have been eaten down by the necessary inches. He preferred somehow to think of it under its soft burial of white. . . .

He was glad when Tim had gone. But as dusk began to come on in the late afternoon, a curious desire for Tim to return came upon him. He found himself suddenly grown into that which he despised—a sensitive being, impressionable! Was his nerve breaking with this premature touch of spring?

Clouds still scudded across the sky, hanging low; some white, like maidens' wedding veils; some black, as faded crêpe from time of mourning. The south wind whispered in the row of poplars by the barn, and caught restlessly at the house in passing, rendering uneasy every window and every creaking board.

Two crows came, flying low, as

Scones finished his chores in the yard. Evil, untimely birds, harbingers of the spring that was not here! He'd rarely seen crows at this season. These two circled about, and mocked at him.

And suddenly Scones was brought as near to poetic imagination as ever he had been. The two black birds became the spirits of Aunt Hannah and old Andy come to haunt him. Their cries were the curses put upon him.

He went into the house, brought out his shotgun, and fired, missing his mark but driving the birds away. He laughed aloud, and called after them derisively, waving his floppy-brimmed hat: "Good-by, Aunt Hannah! Good-by, old Andy!" He felt better then. The conceit of the two spirits brought repeated chuckles. He'd not be weak again.

But when he entered the lonely house presently, he took care to light more than one lamp, and set one roaring fire burning in the fireplace and another in the stove. Outside, where there was a hook over the barn door, he hung a lantern to repel the creeping shadows in the stable yard.

WHY didn't Tim come? Taking a deuced long time to get back with the stuff! Well, coming late like this, Scones would induce the lad to stay all night. He'd need the team early in the morning, and they could go to town together. He hoped nothing had happened to the team.

Tomorrow night he'd not be alone. A pulse sang in his head. Linda would be here. He'd had a woman out to clean Aunt Hannah's room; they'd move in there. It was more fitting for a married couple than his own room.

He made a tour of inspection now. Some of Aunt Hannah's pictures still decorated the walls. One of old Andy Rimmer, too. He'd take that down only it'd be showing the white feather.

Somebody had done Andy in crayons, an amateur artist who had happened along one winter. So there was Andy, full length, with the sweater Aunt Hannah had knit for him bulking out his ancient coat, the whole held in by a corded sash, as his baggy gray trousers were tied under the knees with red strips, betraying the leanness of his old limbs. . . .

Just like that day . . . as he had stood there, in the snow, his hands on the reins, accusing Scones.

Why not take it down? No, that would be weak. What harm could a picture do? It hadn't helped Aunt Hannah, his being up there on the wall. It hadn't helped Aunt Hannah on those last days when she lay paralyzed in her bed, useless to him any more; unable to light fires, or cook meals, or clean rooms—useless, unlovely, a burden to him. The doctor said she might live on, or go at any time. If she was kept very quiet. . . .

Scones fought down the memory now, but was beaten. She'd wanted him to go for old Andy.

"Andy will be here day after tomorrow," he told her.

"I'll not be here then!"

He wished he might relieve her. She was useless, a burden now. And helpless.

"You mustn't excite yourself!"

That was what he kept telling her. And every time he said it, he knew it had the opposite effect.

After a time she gave up calling for old Andy. She wanted her Bible. As he hated poison, so Scones hated the sight of the Book on her dresser.

"You mustn't excite yourself!" he reiterated. In the end, as he expected, she tried to get it. Only three yards separated her from it. It was

then he went in and found her on the floor.

Twice she called "Andy! Andy!" That was all. Scones accepted the certificate of death from natural causes with a virtuous smile.

Well, Andy up there on the wall hadn't done her much good. And he could do as little harm. It might be rather amusing to have him up there looking down upon—upon Linda in turn.

Scones went over now and stared up at the picture. He felt his hands quivering, and held them up for inspection. They were shaking as if with a palsy. This wouldn't do! He shouldn't have recalled Aunt Hannah's death. He shouldn't be standing here before the picture of his other victim.

Yes, he should! Yes, he should! He'd got to fight this out, to defy his nerves, his silly sensitiveness; to fight, too, against the queer soughing of the wind that gave creaking voice to every loose window and board in the place.

Aunt Hannah had always been hearing and interpreting, stupidly, the creaking of boards . . . as of ghosts walking. He'd laughed and enjoyed her fears—even played on them. . . .

What was that? Just a louder gust of wind? That wailing! An orifice in the wood giving entrance to the wind? He found and stuffed a cloth into it; and elsewhere in the house other defects gave tongue.

Why didn't Tim come? Scones went to the door and peered into the darkness. No sign of the light he carried on the sleigh. No sound of bells. The restless wind plucked at his hair, at the skirts of his coat. A ceaseless, dispiriting drip fell from the eaves. What the sun had done by day to melt the snow, the soft wind continued in the dark. You could almost sense the shrinking of the winter covering.

Down, beyond the clearing, lay the forest, whispering in the night. And again Scones' imagination was curiously quickened and focussed. Were the trees whispering of the *thing* exhumed by the melting of the snow?

There, listen! He thought his eardrums would crack with the intensity of his listening. A little jangle of bells. Tim was coming at last! Thank God for that. The phrase, formed mentally, nevertheless seemed to burn his tongue. Not God—God had nothing to do with this. Scones didn't care to believe in God. Well, thank—anything—it was Tim at last. Why didn't the boy light the lantern? The approaching sound in the darkness was eerie without it.

At last he could hear the plodding hoofs sucking and clopping through the rivulets of the roadway. That was better. Clop, clop, and the swish of the runners behind.

He could dimly see it now, in the light of the lantern hung at the barn door. Had the young fool come without the furniture? No outline of goods, piled high, could be seen. Scones had a sense that the sleigh was empty.

Immediately upon this impression came a more terrible one. The thing was driverless. The horses were following the accustomed road home, but no hand held the reins.

Intangible fear struck at Scones. What did it mean? Had Linda come to believe—things about him? Had she been snatched from him at the eleventh hour. A quick rage burned up his fear; as the team swung into the yard he ran forward crying "Whoa!"

It was now directly in the light of the lantern; a dim illumination, but sufficient. The sleigh was not empty. Something had happened to the driv-

er. He lay as if sleeping on the floor of the sleigh. But intuition again told Scones that here was not sleep—but death.

He cried out, however, fearfully: "Tim!"

No answer.

"Tim! Wake up!"

He had no desire to touch death again. But he nerved himself. And then he saw. . . . Stiff, frozen into a rigid horror, the old hands crooked and white, Aunt Hannah's sweater under the gray coat, corded about, as the baggy trousers were held up below the knee with red strips—the corpse of Old Andy!

A cry rang through the night that set the frightened horses tossing heads and manes, and echoed back from the deserted house.

There was a sound of footfalls mushing through the melted snow of the roadway, growing distant. Remained only the soughing of the soft wind and the occasional jangle of bells upon impatient and unstabled horses.

SCONES was fleeing wildly by the only possible way — the road — for deep snow offering no footing elsewhere, he had fallen. His shins barked; he lay swearing incoherently. How had the stripped branch got across his way, as if thrown by an invisible hand?

"What's the hurry, Scones?"

Tim! Young Tim! A quick fear became uppermost in Scones' agony. He had never quite trusted Tim. He struggled to his feet.

"You got what I sent you by the team, Scones?"

Scones could not speak.

"Saw the tracks as I went down," said Tim, with a queer, quivering calmness. "The snow had melted and left the imprint of snowshoes. Went on in — and found that! I thought you might be—interested!"

Tim's voice was boyishly breaking now almost at the point of tears.

Young fool! So he'd thought he'd catch Scones this way, after shrewdly suspecting him! Now that Tim was here, Scones felt brave enough to bluff it through. He'd go back with him, and face — that — that corpse. . . .

"Interested enough," shrilled young Tim, "to run away like a coward and a murderer. And you'd have married Linda——"

A blinding rage possessed Scones. It choked his throat, robbed him of his sanity, set him mouthing almost inarticulately: "I'll kill—I'll kill you, too——"

He leaped upon the boy. He might never have Linda now, he might flee into the night, a murderer, sought by the law, but—at a price. His hands worked for Tim's throat. A softie! He'd always thought so. No muscles to speak of! He'd crush him!

"I guess that'll do, Scones!"

Scones' hands relaxed from their murderous grip. He stared uncertainly at the figure looming over him in the growing starlight—Big Loomis, the Sheriff. No mistaking his voice, his bulk.

Drip! Drip! But there was a cold from the trees. That and the awful beating of his heart. The silent night hushed to hear the words:

"Scones, I arrest you on the charge of murdering Andrew Rimmer!"

Drip! Drip! But there was a cold stirring somewhere. The south wind had played its part. The thaw was over. Winter might now sweep back out of the north and grip the forest trails again.

Achilles' Squeal

By NEIL MORAN

IT was always a source of annoyance to Inspector O'Reilly, that is, from the day when Jimmy Conover first crossed his path, that Jimmy should be walking the streets a free man when O'Reilly knew that he should be behind bars.

Time and again Jimmy had been brought into headquarters and time and again he had walked out. There had never been sufficient evidence to hold him, but O'Reilly had consoled himself with the thought that some time there would be an inevitable day.

This morning, as the inspector sat at his desk glancing over some mail, he turned and said to Reardon, his secretary: "Did you ever hear, Pat, of Achilles' Heel?"

"Of Achilles' what?" said Reardon, scratching his chin.

"Achilles' Heel," said the inspector. "There's a story for you, but I'm too busy to tell it now. By the way, what time is Conover expected?"

Reardon glanced at his desk. "Half-past ten," he said. "Have you got the goods on him now, Inspector?"

"No, Patrick, I'm sorry to say I have not. But he's just like Achilles. You wait and see, now. He's just like Achilles, only one of them is a bum.

The door opened and a detective entered and waved toward the desk.

"Conover," he said, "and his girl is with him."

"Good!" said O'Reilly. "Show them in."

In less than five seconds Jimmy Conover stepped into the room.

"Say, what is this, Inspector?" he said, turning to look at the girl. "What's the idea of getting Kitty and me in here? We've done nothing wrong."

"Sure, I didn't say that you did do anything wrong," said O'Reilly.

"But the last time we were here you did. You grilled us for hours, trying to break us, and then four days later you found that someone else did that job."

O'Reilly got up and came from behind his desk.

"So we did," he said. "So we did. Well, that was too bad, Jimmy. We didn't treat you just right. But now, my boy, you sit down there and listen to what I have to say." He

drew up a chair, dusted it, and Conover sat down, perplexed. "Now you, young lady," said O'Reilly. "Wait a minute. Could you run outside, Patrick, and get them pillows? We want to treat them right."

Reardon grinned and Conover shrugged.

"Well, go ahead and kid, Inspector," he said, "but what's this all about?"

"Did you ever hear of Achilles' Heel?" said the inspector.

"Achilles' Heel?" said Conover. He scratched his head. He looked at Kitty and her expression was blank. "No, I never heard of Achilles' Heel," he said. "What's that?"

"Well, before I tell you," said O'Reilly, as Reardon turned his head, "I want to say this: Now, you know what we think of you and that girl. We believe that you're a pair of clever crooks. I also believe that you take pride in your work. But let me tell you, Conover, that the cleverest crook can slip."

Conover stirred uneasily and threw out his foot.

"All right, Inspector," he said. "What's the point?"

"I suppose you know that there was a bank robbed last night?"

"Yes, I read about it, if it's the same bank."

"Well, it looks like your work. Now I'm not going to grill you. I'm through with that. I've got you here to let you know that we're wise to you and to tell you a story. For, as sure as you're sitting there, Conover, some day you're going to be caught with the goods."

Conover grinned and looked at his girl. He was a dapper young man with a bright face.

"All right, Inspector," he said. "All I can say is I don't know a thing. I'm not a crook and neither is Kitty. We're innocent persons who have been wrongly accused."

The inspector sniffed.

"Well, we won't go into that now. But I'll tell you the story, the story of Achilles' Heel.

"Achilles was a Greek god in mythology. He was the son of King Peleus and the sea-goddess Thetis.

"Now, when he was a child his mother dipped him into the river Styx. She held him by the heels, and she dipped him in the water so that he would be invulnerable—that is, so that he could never be wounded. But part of the heel she held him by didn't touch the water, and that always was Achilles' weak spot.

"Now Achilles grew up and he went into battle, but he always came out unscathed. He seemed to bear a charmed life. Then, one day, an arrow pierced his heel and he was gone. You see, that heel, Conover, was his undoing."

Conover looked at Kitty and Kitty looked up into the inspector's face.

"Why are you telling this story to Jimmy?" she asked.

"Simply because Conover has his weak spot. He has his Achilles' Heel. And no matter how clever he thinks he is, some day he's going to be caught."

The inspector sat down and looked over at Reardon's desk.

"And that, Pat," he said, "is the story. Now you can take Achilles and his young lady out. And some day, Conover, when you're again standing at this desk, that grin won't be on your face."

That was the first time that Jimmy had ever heard of Achilles' Heel. Jimmy understood it, but Kitty did not. When they reached the street she gave him one of those looks that he knew so well and, speaking out of the side of her mouth, spattered her thoughts on the sidewalk.

"Who ever heard," she said, "of a guy that couldn't be wounded any place except in his heel?"

"Now listen, baby," said Jimmy, calling her by his pet name, "you don't get it. You see, it's like this: This story was written, but it never happened. Now this bird Achilles was O. K. every place except one spot in his heel. And when the arrow hit him he just flopped."

Kitty nodded.

"I still don't believe it," she said. "I think O'Reilly is full of a lot of bouillon."

"Well, we won't go into that. But if O'Reilly thinks that I have an Achilles' Heel he's mistaken. Why, my work is perfect. Perfect! Do I ever take unnecessary chances?"

"Never," said Kitty, looking up into his face.

"And don't I know how to step? I'll tell 'em. Why, if those bums think that they're going to catch me napping, they better just flop over and wake up."

IT WAS true that Jimmy had confidence. Not only that, but he had skill. Give him a "job" that he was reasonably sure of and he brought home the bacon, in his own words. He never took chances. And that was the reason why he turned down chances galore.

When "Red" Langdon or Mike Dugan or "Willie the Swede" came to him with some proposal, Conover listened carefully before saying a word. Then he weighed the possibilities, saw his chances, or, not seeing them, turned the proposition down.

He was not the kind to court danger. Though even what he did, Kitty had told him time and again, was dangerous enough. But he wouldn't walk into a place unless his eyes were open and he knew what lay ahead.

For instance, he wouldn't take a chance on entering a place at random and not know what lay behind closed doors. Some of the boys did it, he knew, lots of them, and look where most of them were. In Sing Sing or some other prison. With that caution that was characteristic of him, Jimmy wanted to know where he stood.

It was for this reason that he felt so confident when he stood opposite O'Reilly in the room he had just left. He hadn't robbed the bank. Banks were not in his line. And O'Reilly once before had been mistaken, as Jimmy had taken the trouble to inform him, when he had had him grilled for hours and then found out that another man had done the job. Yes, these inspectors were dumb-bells. Jimmy would tell them all that. . . . But, getting back to Achilles. Getting back to that weak spot. . . .

"Say, listen, baby," he said, as they crossed the avenue, "on the level, where does O'Reilly get that noise—have I an Achilles' Heel?"

Kitty stopped and looked at him.

"No," she said, "but I happen to know that you've got a hole in your sock."

That night she darned it in the flat that they both shared. It so happened that the hole was in the heel. Kitty's fingers trembled and she stuck the needle into her skin.

"Oh!" she said.

"What's the matter?" said Conover, looking up from his chair.

"I pricked my thumb, Jimmy. But it's not that. I've been thinking. Thinking of this Achilles' Heel."

Conover got up and threw the newspaper on the chair.

"What about it?" he demanded.

"Do you believe in signs?"

"What kind of signs?"

"Superstitious signs," said Kitty. "Walking under a ladder. Something like that."

Conover scratched his head. He

was superstitious but he wouldn't admit it. Not even to this girl.

"What about it?" he asked, a little nervously.

"Look!" said Kitty. "Blood! Blood's on this heel! Jimmy, I've got a feeling that they're going to get you!"

"Aw, don't be foolish!" he croaked.

"But listen, honey!" She was down beside him on her knees. "I couldn't give you up. You're all the world to me. Suppose you're brought in cold some night from some patrolman's gat."

Conover dropped his hand on her head.

"Don't talk foolish," he answered, but his knees shook.

"But I think, Jimmy, you ought to lay low. Promise me, Jimmy, that you'll do it. That you'll give this life up."

Jimmy looked at her and shook his head.

"No," he said. "No chance. What would we do? We got to eat. We got to have clothes."

"Ah, but I'd work," said Kitty. "And so could you."

"Don't you think being a crook is hard work enough?"

"But it's so dangerous, Jimmy!"

"So is crossing the road. You got to take chances. But"—drawing himself up—"you got to know what kind of chances to take."

There he was, cocky, confident and filled with conceit.

"If they get me," he said, "they'll know I made a misstep. But they'll never get me, baby, and you just get that out of your head."

That ended the discussion there. Kitty knew that she couldn't do anything with him the way he felt now. So she took the sock, folded it and put it into a drawer.

She wouldn't let Jimmy wear that sock. Her superstition began to grow. She imagined him lying in a gutter, a victim of some policeman's gun. She closed her eyes and seemed to see him running over a roof. The "bulls' were after him and Jimmy suddenly sank. Blood spurted and——

Kitty let out a scream.

"Say, what is it?" said Conover, springing to his feet.

"Nothing," said Kitty. "I was dozing. I had a terrible dream."

THAT NIGHT "Red" Langdon and some of the boys came around and greeted Jimmy with outstretched hands.

"Well, kid," said Langdon, "what happened at headquarters?"

"Oh, you know, that mush tried to kid me along. He told me a story that's kind of got Kitty's goat. Do you guys want to go back to the kindergarten?"

"Red" scratched his head.

"How's that?" he demanded.

"Well, here's the yarn. Gather round me, children, while I unfold the tale. Once upon a time there was a little kid by the name of Achilles, and his old lady, trying to do him a favor, shoved him into the river. Achilles got doused every place except on his heel. The old lady held him by that. There's something that I don't understand—that she didn't put the heel in, too. But that's the story."

"That's a devil of a story," said "Red."

"Now wait a minute," said Jimmy. "What did this sopping do? Why, it makes this kid so—so—well, you know what I mean—so—anyway, that he can't be wounded any place the water touched.

"Think what a crook that kid would have made! Well, what happened to him? He grows up the same as all little boys who live, and goes into battle. You see, this feller lived in the days when they used spears. And he could take

them right and left and they were as so many pins.

"Now one day our bright little feller steps out in his brand-new suit. These spears are shootin' all around him, but what does he care? His slogan was to spear him again. And then what should happen but a spear hits him in the heel and he drops dead."

"Didn't he have his shoe on?" asked "Red."

"How do I know? I wasn't there. But what do you think of the story?"

"Red" scratched his head.

"Not so good. I think it's junk. Now I'll tell one."

"No, you won't," said Kitty. "You keep those stories to yourself."

"But what was O'Reilly's idea in telling it?" said "Red."

"Don't you know?" Jimmy stood up. "Why, he says that I have an Achilles' Heel. That I have a weak spot. And sooner or later I'm going to be caught."

"Red" grinned.

"Well, if you ask me," he said, "I think O'Reilly was full of gin. But we didn't come here to be entertained with stories. We've got something for you and you're the man for the job."

Kitty looked up. Conover folded his arms and signified by a nod for "Red" to go ahead.

"Well," said "Red," "it's like this: I know you don't take no chances, Jimmy, unless they're good. And here we got everything sitting pretty. A guy I know knows a chauffeur that got sacked. This chauffeur ain't feelin' any too good toward his old boss, so he happens to mention that he hopes crooks will get into the house."

"And is the boss away?" asked Conover, his mind alert.

"Sure. Him and his family and the servants. It's a clean sweep. And the house ain't being watched!"

Jimmy nodded, opened a drawer and took out his gun.

"What are you doing?" asked Kitty.

"You see me. I'm getting my gat."

"But you can't go, Jimmy. Think of that heel!"

She ran to another drawer and took out a sock.

"Say, what is this?" asked "Red."

"Oh, she's got all kinds of notions," explained Conover, "since O'Reilly spilled that tale. Seems to think that I'm goin' to be caught and get a piece of lead in my heel."

"Let me look at that sock," said "Red."

"I will not!" Kitty cried. "And I don't want you to take Jimmy Conover out of this house!"

"He's takin' us," said "Red." "Ready, Jim?"

Conover nodded and started toward the door. His lips were compressed.

Kitty ran after him.

"Jimmy," she cried, throwing her arms around his shoulders, "think!"

"Oh, don't be foolish!" he ejaculated. "Stop this noise!"

"But the heel, Jimmy! And what O'Reilly said!"

"Oh, to hell with the heel and O'Reilly!" said Conover. "Come on!"

He was gone and Kitty heard clattering feet going down the stairs. She ran to the window and saw the four men going up the street.

"He's going to be caught!" she shrieked. "I know it! They're going to bring him in stiff!"

BUT three hours later, as she lay exhausted on the bed, she heard the door open and Jimmy came quietly into the room.

Kitty looked up. Half doubting, she passed a hand across her eyes.

Then she grew a little hysterical, as she sprang up.

"Jimmy," she cried, "they didn't get you! You——"

"Now listen, baby," he said quietly, "for the love of Mike, shut up. I told you they wouldn't get me. That I was taking no chance. Look at this! Pretty, ain't it? Some of this bird's silver that I'm going to sell. And this! What do you think of this watch?"

Kitty looked at him.

"Did you get anything for me, Jimmy?" she asked, forgetting how she had been alarmed.

"No, nothing for a woman," he said. "But here's a little jack. We found some money, but had to split it four ways. Now I'll tell you what we'll do. Tomorrow night we'll step out. And you just forget worrying about me. I ain't got no Achilles' Heel, honey, and I don't take no chance."

With the first "job" accomplished since the warning had come, Kitty began to allay her fears. Now it was a horse of a different color. She began to look upon Jimmy in the old light. He was invincible. He would never be caught. He took no unnecessary chances and knew how to step.

But on and off fear returned to her, for the impression of that heel had stamped itself on her mind. Yet, as Jimmy had said, they had to eat and Kitty was not the kind to forget her stomach any more than she would forget her back. So the next day she stepped into a store and bought a new coat.

When Jimmy saw it on her that night, he grinned.

"Well, baby," he said, "ain't you glad now that I went?"

"Yes," she said slowly, for results compelled the remark. "But I've just been thinking, Jimmy. You never took a chance for me. Of course, I'd never want you to take the chance. I mean that if there was something that I wanted you to steal and it was outside of what you call a 'safe chance,' I'd never want you to do it."

"And believe me," said Conover, "I never would. I couldn't afford to. That's where I would have an Achilles' Heel. But as long as I go along figuring my shots—I tell you, baby, it's a cinch!"

So it seemed. The weeks passed and Jimmy was doing very well. He came home regularly and dumped money into Kitty's lap. And as always when these ventures were successful, Kitty applauded as she greedily feasted her eyes. But in the intervals when Jimmy was lying low, that fear returned to Kitty and she thought of the heel.

One night when she felt particularly oppressed, she took Jimmy's hand.

"Jimmy," she said, "you know I love you and you love me. I know that girls like you, but you can't see any of them, just as I can't see any of your pals. But there's something I want to tell you, Jimmy. Beware of 'Red.'"

"'Red!'" said Jimmy.

"Yes, he ain't your friend. You know he always liked me and said you cut him out."

"But that ain't no reason to beware of him," said Jimmy. "'Red's' a good scout."

"But I have the feeling," said Kitty, as she walked over to a chair, "that 'Red' would turn on you. Now, if I feel this way, don't you think I ought to speak out?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. "But you're all wrong about 'Red.' Why, 'Red's' one of the best friends I've got."

Kitty dropped the discussion and it ended there. She had given her warning and felt relieved. But later, after Jimmy had left the flat,

she wondered if she hadn't been wrong. After all, "Red" was a pal and pals stick together, or should. No, she guessed she was just unnecessarily alarmed. She was a little unnerved from thinking too much of "that heel."

It was around eight o'clock when she left the flat, and it was around that hour when Jimmy set off to tackle his first big "job." He had reached the stage where he was throwing discretion to the winds. Of course, he hadn't told Kitty about it. Kitty wouldn't understand. And that made him smile, and as he hurried along he wondered if he hadn't been taking chances all along. Of course he had. Certain kinds of chances, but none like this that he was taking now.

He was going to a house to rob a safe. There was a driving force propelling him and as he came up out of the subway he stopped. Was it worth the risk? He thought of Kitty and then of something else, and his eyes shone like twin stars. Yes, it was worth it. He couldn't go on being a small crook all his life.

So he crossed the road, hailed a taxi and gave instructions to be driven to a certain street.

IT WAS not until nine o'clock the next morning that Jimmy showed up at the flat. He came in, jubilant. There was a bright light in his eyes and as he threw his hat on a chair he looked around for Kitty.

"Kitty!" he called. But there was no answer. Then he walked over and found the note pinned on the bed.

"I've been worrying sick about you," he read, "and hope you're all right. I've gone out for some food."

Jimmy set down and rubbed his head. Well, he was all right, thanks to his skill. He saw now that he had been wasting his time. He had got away with his first big "job" and had proved that he had no Achilles' Heel.

But as he sat there a chill came over him and he shook. Someone was in the room. He was as sure of it as he was that he was sitting on that chair. And then he turned and looked up into Detective Connors' face.

"What the——" he began. "What are you doing here?"

"Sort of surprised you, eh?" said Connors. "You should have locked the door."

"Oh, I don't need to lock the door," said Jimmy, "when I ain't got nothing to fear."

"Tell it to O'Reilly."

"Do you mean O'Reilly sent you here?"

"Yeah. He wants to see you," said Connors. "Do you know 'Red' Langdon was pinched last night?"

Jimmy stood up.

"No," he said. "But what's that got to do with me?"

"O'Reilly will tell you. Get your hat."

On the way to headquarters Jimmy thought of what Kitty had said. What a fool he had been to trust "Red." He saw it all now. "Red" had squealed. And he could imagine O'Reilly's gloating face.

"It's tough," he thought. "Tough! Just when I pulled a big deal."

As he stepped into the inspector's office, O'Reilly looked up from his desk.

"Ah, good morning, Conover," he said. "Do you remember that little story about Achilles' Heel?"

"Yes, I remember it," said Jimmy. He hung his head.

"Well, it seems," said O'Reilly, "that I was right. We got the goods on you, Conover, and I want to know if you care to confess."

Jimmy wondered. Was this another stall? Maybe after all "Red" hadn't been caught.

"Confess to what?" he asked.

"Confess to robbing a certain house. Do you know that 'Red' Langdon was brought in?"

"So I heard," said Jimmy. "But I want to see him."

"So that's it. You want to see him." O'Reilly drummed his fingers on the desk. He was smiling and as Jimmy turned he saw that Reardon was smiling, too.

"Well, I guess we'll have to spring it on him now, Pat," said O'Reilly to his secretary. "Go and bring 'Red' in."

Reardon went out and Jimmy sat down in a chair. They had it on him this time, he was sure, but as the door opened his expression changed. It was not "Red" who came in with Reardon. It was Kitty Saunders!

Conover sprang up. "Kitty!" he said. "What does this mean?"

"Why, it means—say, did you get my note?"

She was laughing and Conover suddenly began to understand. It dawned on him now. He read it in Kitty's eyes; saw it in O'Reilly's gloating face; he seemed to feel it in the air.

Kitty stood looking at him with smoldering eyes. How she had changed! How she had changed from the Kitty he knew, the one who had sworn love and devotion!

But this Kitty was a snake who suddenly raised her head and glided forward.

"You'd never take a chance for me!" she screamed. "You'd never take a chance for me! I never wanted you to. Did I? No! But you went to that house last night and took a chance for her! You took a chance for her!"

Yes, there it all was, as if Kitty, in plain English, had told him that she had heard of his looting that house to steal a pearl necklace for a certain discharged maid. Kitty knew! And as she stood there pointing an accusing finger at him, O'Reilly arose.

"Well," he said, "have you got an Achilles' Heel, Conover?"

Jimmy Conover's moment had come. He had been double-crossed, betrayed into the hands of the police. But his moment had come.

"No! No! No!" he shouted. "The job was perfect! It was an Achilles' squeal!"

The Cardinal Lane

By ELIZABETH HERRICK

Author of "Jewels," "The Crimson Robe," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

I

AN old red covered cart and gray horse, an old man with strongly Semitic features and venerable gray beard, driving the cart along the Woronoco road, and a dusty wayfarer with watchful, ferret eyes, set like loopholes in his broad, flat face, plodding along the same highroad, were the only animated things in sight so far as the ferret eyes could reach.

The wayfarer swung around as the cart overtook him and said something to the old man, who nodded and shifted along the seat. The wayfarer scrambled up beside him.

They rode in silence for a mile or so, each furtively taking stock of the other, then the owner of the ferret eyes launched a question—about business. What was the pedler's line?

Men's ready-to-wear suits that the Jew peddled throughout the country districts. The ferret eyes grew smaller and keener. A coincidence—for the wayfarer wanted to buy one. He'd try on a couple when they got to some woods.

There was woods ahead a bit, the pedler informed him—opposite where he would stop for dinner. He'd begun a picture of the spot—"a rare bit of color"—a year ago and thought to finish it today. The wayfarer eyed him contemptuously. He was more interested in the pedler's stock than his pictures.

As they drove along, the old man loosened up a bit to his prospective customer. Business was poor. Now that most farmers had automobiles they bought their clothes in the cities. This trip, now, had netted him less than half what the same route brought him five years ago. Then perhaps the pedler would

sell? The traveler spoke like a cautious man with funds to invest. He was looking more for a business that would keep him outdoors—his doctor had prescribed "hikes," but perhaps a cart was as good—than for big profits.

The conversation became close and shrewd. He of the ferret eyes proved himself no novice in trade. The pedler argued and haggled, but over lunch in a little flowering lane that led down to the rushing mountain river, he named a price that the wayfarer agreed to consider.

Lunch over, the pedler brought out a paint-box and a little picture of the lane they were in and began "touching up," as he said, the red flowers that grew on the riverbank. "But no color," he complained, "had ever been ground that could match that unpaintable red."

The ferret eyes watched him restively, as if their owner grudged the wasted time, and his dust-brown shoes shuffled the ground restively, too, as if they itched to be off.

At last the pedler put up his paints and they went back to the cart, then, at the pedler's suggestion, up into the woods the other side of the road to try on a suit.

THE old horse grazed along the roadside till a sharp crack deep in the woods brought his nose anxiously up from the clover. He whinnied and looked toward the woods for his master, and whinnied again as the traveler came out of them on the run, the suit over one arm.

The man's face was ashen. He clambered into the wagon, flung the suit over back and gathered up the reins. Turning the wagon around, he drove a half-mile or so up the road to where he remembered a cart-road that led into the woods. He drove down it a way and tethered the horse to a tree. Coming out of the woods, he walked briskly back toward the town.

Reaching the lane, where he had gone with the pedler, he hesitated, then went laggardly out of sight up it. After a few minutes he walked down on the other side to the river, where he stood looking out into the water. It wasn't a half-bad idea—and the old chap had seemed to like the spot—said 'twas a "rare bit of color." Too red, though—too vividly red for the traveler's own fancy.

"God!" he said, as he turned on his heel and made for the highroad. "It shrieks, it does, like the old guy said!"

He walked very fast now, his brisk gait in striking contrast to his weary shuffle of two hours back. He must be, he figured, somewhere near that mill the pedler had told him about, where he could get some packing-boxes, a half-mile from the town. Oh, there it was, standing back from the road on the brim of a full millpond.

He had to wait in the office for the proprietor to get through with a customer, and shifted restively from one foot to the other, while his ferret eyes took covert and rather uneasy stock of the man.

When his turn came, however, he gave his order glibly enough, but wasn't sure of his sizes. The box-manufacturer, pen poised to take down the order, gave him a second glance.

The tramp exploded, very hot and red under the not too friendly interrogation of the mill-owner's eyes: "The same size you make for old Rosenberg—the pedler," he ordered savagely. "He sent me to you. I've bought out his business."

The young manufacturer gave the new business man a third glance of strong dislike and dawning suspicion and curtly refused the order.

He could not make boxes without the correct dimensions. The wayfarer, very red and discomfited, and cursing under his breath, shambled out.

Alec Carpenter looked after him reflectively. Whatever the fellow was up to, it was safe to say it was no good. The man took the road to town, which lay some hundred yards in sight from the mill.

Idly speculating, Carpenter watched him until he disappeared beyond the turn, then suddenly jumped to his feet. He remembered all at once that the Woronoco road passed the gray bungalow—a little flower-bedecked, isolated house with fields and woods all around and not a man on the place—just the artist-girl and her colored servant; the "Mammy," gossip spread, of her Southern childhood. He grabbed his hat and, flinging behind him to his stenographer an unenlightening "Back soon!" ran out to his Buick.

But when the sedan took the curve the tramp was nowhere in sight. So far, so good, for the scamp hadn't had time to reach the bungalow. He had probably turned off into the woods.

His mind relieved on this score, Carpenter had no earthly excuse for going on. But he went on, driving more slowly the nearer he came, while his heart made up in speed for the crawl of his car.

The cobblestone chimneys of the bungalow developed against the August sky, then, as the Buick took the slight rise, the whole perfect little landscape was revealed, a Watteau, set in a blue-green frame of sky and trees.

The weather-shingled walls, with quaint nooks and corners and rose-lattices, the cobblestone garden wall, the exquisite riot of pink and blue and white and lavender over the garden wall—a Watteau in detail, except that the beautiful lady, like a flower herself in some tissue gown of orchid shade, was disappointingly missing from the scene. As Carpenter's Buick passed, in as low as his engine permitted, the old negress stared curiously at him from the kitchen door, but he caught not so much as a fleeting glimpse of the lady herself.

It was vexatious, after the trouble he'd taken! Though, of course, Carpenter was glad that everything was all right at the bungalow. Still, if it hadn't been, and he had swept up in high at the psychological moment, he couldn't help thinking what an introduction for a hero! Then, having thought and looked backward as far as a twisted neck allowed him, he laughed, shamefacedly, at his folly and stepped on the gas.

If, however, he had looked less at the Watteau and more at the blossoming fields, he might have espied her coming through them, escorted by a great police dog of warning mien. Not a Watteau lady in orchid tissue today, but a crisp up-to-the-minute professional woman in knickers, tailored blouse and dark blue four-in-hand, a portable easel under one arm and a great sheath of flaming red flowers across the other.

And if she had looked less at the clover and daisies and more at the dusty sweep of the highroad she might have seen him looking back before his Buick leaped into the gray dust-smother. As it was she glimpsed only the disappearing car and the dust-smother. But the racket of the Buick's exit left her aware of its presence.

"Lordy Massy!" she remarked to the dog. "That young mill-heir is going to smash himself up some day—you'll see!" However, having

something more important on her mind than the Olympian one, who had vanished into his legendary cloud, she dismissed him at once and, swinging through the cobblestone gateway and up the quaint cobble steps between tall Delft jars of cut larkspurs, she disappeared in the house.

She breezed through the wide, cool hall and dropped "Hello, Mammy darling!" over the banister as she ran upstairs to the little studio under the roof to put the cardinal flowers into a jar of dull pottery.

She stood back and observed the effect with a deep-drawn breath and ardent little hands clasped to her breast. Then she tossed her hat on the couch and kicked her rubbers under it, unfolded the field easel and set it up near the canvas on the large easel under the skylight, and tugged the jar of cardinal flowers between the two.

"Now we'll see!" she told herself, as she carefully turned the cover-cloth back from her picture. She stood for several minutes glancing from sketch to picture with gravely intent face and puckered brow. Yes, it was just as she feared—there was something she hadn't quite got into the big picture that was in the sketch. Ah, now she could see.

She caught palette and brushes and began to paint with swift, sure touches, scarce letting go her held breath. *Now* she was getting it.

Into the gorgeousness of the western sky over the white birch and evergreen wood, the blood-red gleam aslant the little trodden path that led down to the narrow mountain river, the vivid masses of cardinal flowers either side the path and standing foot-deep in the lush reeds on the river's brim, she was breathing something—a spell of expectancy—a tension of waiting. It was no longer merely a landscape—it was a landscape that promised something, like a day that held the certainty of a tomorrow.

The light was failing when she laid down her brushes, but she felt the elation of achievement. At last she had painted what had all along been her waking dream—a story without words.

II

JUNE went to bed that night still in the same ecstasy of uplift, her lips at last, after these bitter years of struggle, at the brimming cup of success, and for hours lay sleepless, her eyes still held by that glowing cardinal lane, leading straight down the darkness of her room through the open window to that starlit blue expanse that lay like a boundless river beyond the fringe of orchard trees.

And when, after hours of watchful wakefulness, she fell into exhausted sleep, her dream still followed the lane's winding through the fields down to the water's edge. The sunset hues faded; the cardinal flowers darkened to black-purple; yet still the blood-red gleam slanted across the path like a stain that would not be hid. She became uneasy in her sleep. It seemed to her that something was impending—something that threatened her picture.

She started up with dry lips and strangled voice, wanting to cry out that "they" were spoiling her picture and unable to utter the words. It was morning. The sunlight was golden on counterpane and pillow. A fragrant wind blew in through the ruffled curtains. Birds twittered and trilled above the purl of the river.

June drew a deep breath of

mingled relief and artist joy in the morning. Yet, as she dressed, she could not altogether shake off the depression of her dream. The chill deepened as she tried to call it back to her waking consciousness. It had been a lurid dream—a black-purple world with a sinister red stain across it.

Of course it could mean only that she had painted at too high pressure, and her shot nerves were exacting the pay. And yet, what if it meant that the picture, so beautiful and vivid to its creator, would be just a lurid travesty to its critics? Last night she had been sure it would be hung in the Metropolitan. This morning she felt the sickening certainty that it would fail.

She did not wait to finish dressing, but slipped into a peach-silk robe and her satin *d'Orsays* and ran up to her attic studio. The morning light flooded it through the skylight. The gorgeous reds of sky and lane glowed, as the afternoon before, in her vision, but her first glance at the picture told her something was wrong.

It was a minute or two, though, before she discovered just what it was—so convincing, so startlingly suggestive was the transformation. The certainty of something that had happened or of something about to happen was now even more than yesterday the theme of her picture.

Either side of the lane, down to the water's edge, the tall masses of cardinal flowers were bent and broken and one lay prone on the water like an accusing blood-stained finger pointing into the river.

She gazed at the canvas with horror-wide, fascinated eyes. Who had touched, who had dared to touch, her picture? And yet, was not the touch masterly? Had it not given to her picture something it had seemed waiting for yesterday to make it great? *Who* had made the change, and *why?*

She was alone in the gray bungalow except for old black Chloe in the kitchen. The idea of Chloe achieving any masterpiece outside of pastry brought a ripple of laughter to her whitened lips.

Had June made the change herself, rising in the night from that troubled sinister dream of purple-black and reds to guide her sleeping hand by a subconscious mind? Yet if she had really painted in her sleep, there was not proof of it on the table near the easel, left just as yesterday when she stopped work.

The brushes stood soaking in turpentine in a pint milk-bottle. There were no fresh colors on her palette —she remembered cleaning it off with turpentine the last thing before she went to bed.

Her puzzled, almost anxious eyes dropped from the table to the floor and again started, for on the white ostrich spray of one satin *d'Orsay* a ray of sunlight picked out a small red blot like blood.

She kicked off the slipper and lifted it. Caught in the ostrich spray was a single cardinal flower. She drew a quick breath of relief. Still, the real flower didn't change the mystery of the cardinal lane in the picture—the crushed masses of vivid lobelia—that one sinister spray that lay pointing into the river.

She shivered, though it was mid-August. She was cold in the peach silk robe, shaking in the satin *d'Orsays*. It was as if somebody else had stood where she was standing, had taken her brushes and painted into her picture all that it had yesterday lacked of a tragedy without words.

SO far had the picture carried her

from the world of the actual that Chloe's voice up the staircase, "Breffus am ready, Honey!" reached her consciousness so slowly that a shining ebony face was framed in the doorway before June heeded the summons.

"Oh, Lawdy gracious, Missy Juney!" chanted the old negress, her eyes rolling as they stared at the canvas. "Looks lak dere was sum'fin' turrible down dere in de ribber! Mebbe de 'gators dey got hole ob sum'body an' pull him in!"

June came to herself with a start.

What a goose she had been! Her dream had moved her so much that she had just got up and painted in her sleep. Geniuses worked that way sometimes—not that June called herself a genius, but Poe was, and Coleridge, and they had written their greatest poems under wine and opium. The comparison reassured her.

Anyhow, it was wonderful to do something great whatever way you did it. And that trodden-down crimson, that red finger-print on the river, June knew she would never have got herself unless she was dreaming or "drunk," too.

She folded the peach robe around her slender figure till she looked like a drawn-pink gladiolus half out of its sheath, and scurried back to her bedroom, throwing behind her a laughing, "'Gators don't swim in Yankee rivers, Mammy darling!"

But while she was eating Chloe's most melting corn-cake and drinking her most luscious coffee, the marvel of the night came back with fresh force. For the purpose of taking somebody else's judgment on the matter, even a black somebody's—Mammy's mind, though, wasn't black—June rang Chloe in from the kitchen.

"Mammy, who do you think meddled with my picture last night?"

"Lawdy, Missy! What yo' mean, honey? De picture right dere jus' where it was las' night."

"Sure!" June drew absorbedly on Chloe's gleaming damask with her silver fork. "But, Mammy, the cardinal flowers, those red flowers in the picture, aren't just where they were last night. They stood straight and tall either side of the path. And this morning when I ran in to look at the picture, they were all bent and broken and one of them in the river. Who do you think did it?"

"Lawdy, Massy!" the old negress' face turned a sickly ash. "Dey didn't do it deirselves, Missy! De ha'nt did it. Ha'nts dey kin do ennyt'ing."

"A ha'nt?" June looked up from the tablecloth. "Ha'nt of whom, Mammy?"

"De man in de ribber!" Chloe's whites were rolling again, half in fear, half in ecstasy. She was on ground dear to a darky's heart. "Dey done drag him down de lane to de ribber an' dey t'rew him in an' den—an' den——"

"And then?" prompted June, as Chloe stopped, apparently at the end of her circumstantial rope. But the negro love of climax spliced the rope triumphantly.

"An' den de man he got up in de night out of de ribber, all dripping wet, an' he come an' he paint in de picture where dey done drag him down dere."

"Oh, dear!" June half laughed, half shivered. "Where in the world do you get all that, Mammy?"

The negress regarded her solemnly.

"It's all dere in de picture!" she averred.

June cupped her chin in her palm

and looked up at Chloe out of eyes darkly profound.

"I wonder!" she mused. "But how in the world did I ever get it there?"

The negress' tone subtly reproached.

"It wa'nt yo', honey. It war de ha'nt. De ha'nt put it dere so dey kin fin' him."

Absurd as the idea seemed, Chloe's own evident belief in it was contagious. June sat motionless, her chin still in her palms, her eyes spellbound on Chloe's rolling orbs. It required effort to shake herself free. She jumped up with a laugh that, after all, wasn't natural.

"I'll go find him, then," she promised and ran upstairs for her hat.

She was down again in ten minutes, in white linen knickers and serge jacket, a sketching box and the folding easel under one arm. Her exit through the living-room brought Chloe in panic to the kitchen porch.

"Tak' de dog, honey! Tak' de dog!"

More to quiet Chloe's apprehensions than because she expected to find anything unusual in the landscape, June whistled to Gretchen and set off across the fields, the great war-dog, who had served in Belgium and was a bequest of June's officer-brother, leaping on ahead.

Suddenly the dog stopped, nosed around some bushes, then sniffed suspiciously along the short grass in the lane. Her suspicions verified, she flung up her head and started in great leaps down the lane.

"Oh, Lordy Massy!" thought June, in agony. "She's started a cat!" Cats were Gretchen's pet abhorrence and fared ill in her power. "But try to stop her!"

June broke into a loping trot, just keeping the dog in sight. "I'm the last person in the world to own a dog, for I couldn't kill anything. Heigho! Lordy Massy! Whoever'd have thought it?"

For the dog, coursing down the lane to the river, had disappeared in the lush grass on its brim and was barking her head off at the water's edge. But it wasn't the dog that held June rooted to the lane. It was that great mass of cardinal flowers that had called yesterday to her beauty-loving soul. They were there, still—no longer gloriously stately—but bent, crushed, broken, while on the water floated a single bent stalk, blood-red, like a stained finger pointing, just as in her picture, God knew at what!

June shuddered. It was eerie. She was glad it was morning, not sunset. She was glad that sinister red gleam did not lie in the path. It was bad enough at best, uncanny enough—for what had bent and crushed all that beauty?

And how had June known? Had she really got up in her sleep and painted the changed landscape into her picture with such startling fidelity, or had something happened down here by the river—something terrible, that called mutely for avengement?

On the heels of the thought came a cry—a cry so agonized, so terrible that the air seemed to reel with it. For an instant in June's eyes the red bank and the blue sky ran together, an indistinguishable blur.

Then the cry came again, long-drawn, terrible, and it came from the lush grass and trampled flowers where Gretchen had disappeared! She had something down, and it wasn't a cat! Oh, Lord, it wasn't a cat! June ran, her heart adding its din to her ears.

III

TO reach the dog, June had only to follow the wake of cardinal flowers and in a minute she saw the gray-and-black back twisting and thrashing in the sedge at the end of the trail.

Gretchen had nothing down, not even a cat. She was down herself, her forepaws locked fast in a huge steel trap, a prong of which had penetrated her right paw. Blood was flowing from the wound and Gretchen interrupted her piteous crying to lap it away.

"Oh, you poor thing!" June bent over the dog, whose brown, agonized eyes lifted beseechingly to hers. "And I can't do anything!" she cried, after an ineffectual bungling effort to spring the trap, which made the dog scream again and strain at the trap.

"All right! All right! Missy'll get you out! Missy'll go get somebody!" But when she turned to go, the animal tried to leap after her. The trap being anchored deep in the marshy ground, the effort only increased the dog's agony. Foam began to drip from her jaws.

It was clear June could not leave her. She sat down on a hummock beside the dog and took the gray head on her knees, stroking it softly. The bridge, she remembered, was only a short way up the road. Any team or automobile crossing it would be heard down here. At the first sound she would call for help.

But the road was remote from the business section of the town and led to outlying districts. It seemed hours that she sat there, her ears strained toward the highroad.

Gretchen had stopped screaming, but long shudders ran down her body and she moaned incessantly. June thought the dog dying and began to cry softly. Her tears fell on the damp head.

At last the sound came—a "honk" sweet to her waiting ears, a whir, a short rattle over the loose planks of the bridge. Gretchen heard, too, and, as if she sensed succor, lifted her head and again from her throat came that long-drawn, hideous, near-human cry. To that indescribable note, June added her own voice of fear and distress. They must hear and stop. Oh, they must stop!

"Help! Help! Oh, quick!"

The car stopped—near, she thought, the head of the lane. She heard the rebellious g-r-r under its brakes, the throbbing pant of the engine, then excited voices talking in the road, in the lane, nearer—nearer. They had heard, they were coming!

Then out of the confused blur of sound running feet came sharply, ahead of the rest, and a voice ahead of the rest, too, a cheery young voice that thrilled through her distress.

"Coming!"

And the next minute the owner of the voice stood above them, splendid, towering, a superb physical specimen of young manhood. It was, as she had somehow known from her own reaction to the voice, the young mill-heir.

He came up, as in his fond imaging of the day before, "in high"; not the superb spurt of a high-powered car, but of his own russet-shod feet, breathless, panting, his handsome young face pulsing crimson under the clear skin, but a hero, none the less, in June's eyes, if not in his own.

"Right here!" she called almost from his feet. And then he saw the dark nimbus of her hair, the masculine blue serge coat below it, rise from the grass. It was, as he had known from the beginning it must

be, the artist-girl from the gray bungalow.

"Right here!" she repeated, as if she feared even now he might miss them. "Oh, I'm so glad somebody came at last. I've been waiting hours. My dog is caught in a trap and I couldn't free her. She was running ahead and I heard a scream. At first I thought she was killing something—she *will* kill cats. Though it didn't sound like a cat. Then I saw she was caught herself, but I couldn't do anything. I tried to spring the trap, but it wouldn't spring, and Gretchen screamed so terribly——" She stopped, shuddering at the memory.

"Thank God!" Carpenter said in his heart, not, though, for the dog's predicament, nor yet for that desired rôle of hero thrust so suddenly on him. "We thought you were hurt," he said to her, in a voice a bit shaken.

He was on his knees now by the dog, who looked up into his face piteously. The girl knelt beside him, her flushed, entrancingly pretty face close to his.

"She struggled so I didn't dare to leave her to go for help. I was afraid she'd break her legs, if she hasn't already broken them. So I just sat and waited. I knew I'd hear the first auto that came over the bridge, but none came till just now. And I've been waiting for hours!"

"Oh, that's too bad!" he sympathized, his heart interrupting his words queerly. "At this time of day, though, there wouldn't be much passing. Poor girl! Poor Gretchen!" he soothed the dog, as the animal cringed and screamed again under his touch. Then, to Gretchen's mistress, though in the same tone of almost caress, "A prong has gone clean through her right paw, but I think no bones are broken. Please don't worry! I'll have her out in a jiffy."

He pressed the spring with his foot and the trap sprang open. Gretchen, released, pulled herself free and fawned on her rescuer. He picked up the injured paw and examined it.

"H'm!" he said, "ugly wound, Gretchen! You should wash it when you get home, Miss—Miss——?"

"June Randolph!" she supplied, with a slight smiling bow. "We're very grateful to you, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Carpenter—Alec Carpenter!" he supplied, with a bow that emulated hers. "But please wash Gretchen's foot, won't you?"

"Surely. What will I wash it in?" she asked doubtfully, "alcohol or witchhazel?"

"Oh, Lord, no! She'd go crazy. Sylpho-napthol and warm water."

BUT Gretchen didn't wait for antiseptics. She proceeded to wash the wound herself by dashing into the river, at least that is what June had just opened her lips to say, paying the time-worn tribute to animal sagacity, when the young man took the words out of her mouth.

"Oh, no, no! She's following the quarry that led her to the trap. Running water destroys scent, but perhaps the dog sees something over across there."

June's heart skipped a beat. The altered picture came back. She looked down at the broken cardinal flower pointing into the river.

"Perhaps it wasn't game!" she said sombrely. "Police dogs don't course game, do they? Only cats."

Carpenter's eyes, alert with a sportsman's eagerness on the swimming dog, came back to hers, questioning.

"Oh, you think——?"

"I don't know what I think," she answered him slowly. "But the river bank wasn't like this yesterday,

Mr. Carpenter. All these cardinal flowers stood up straight and tall. Now they're bent and crushed as if"—she hesitated a second—"something heavy was dragged over them to the river."

They looked into each other's faces a minute, as if seeking the same thing. Then Carpenter spoke:

"There's a queer mark in the road above here. Mr. Royce saw it this morning when he went by in his milk cart. He thought what you think.

"There was a heel-print in the middle of the mark in a bit of soft mud, not a print made in walking, but cornerwise, he said, as if the foot had been dragged. He didn't like the look of things, and I didn't like the look of them either, when he told me, so I phoned the sheriff and we came down to see.

"We heard the dog, then your call for help. We thought, of course, you were the victim we'd come to find, so we sprinted. I happened to come in ahead of the rest; you see," he excused his "psychological minute" entrance with becoming modesty, "I was on the team at Harvard."

"Thank you!" she said simply. "We were in trouble all right, but not that. What happened here," she looked down at the bank, "must have been worse."

He nodded.

"Mr. Royce found a button and a scrap of cloth back there," he gestured behind him, "caught in the fork of a twig. That looked, too, as if something had been dragged and the button had caught and torn out of the cloth. Ah, here they come!"

The men straggled up, panting. Carpenter sent his voice over the bushes to guide them.

"Here we are! Miss Randolph's dog was caught in a trap, but we're all right now." He turned back to June.

"May I help you?" He took her arm, as she stood poised on a hummock in the marshy ground and swung her boyishly to the next. She laughed and a little wave of pink swept up into her hair.

"Takes me back to the Southland," she told him, "when my brother and I went hunting 'gators in the swamps."

The men met them on terra firma with relieved faces.

"We thought there had been foul play, Miss Randolph," said Sheriff Morehouse, "and that you were the victim. We're very glad that you're not."

She shrugged, smiling.

"So am I. My dog was the victim. Somebody set a wicked trap down there."

"What for, do you suppose?" asked the sheriff of Carpenter. "Muskrats."

"Possibly!" But Carpenter's tone lacked conviction. He was still watching the swimming dog that, half way across the stream, seemed suddenly doubtful. She was swimming in a circle now, around a big white boulder that stood up out of the river. The milkman, following Carpenter's eyes, grew excited.

"That's the very stone I was telling you about out there. It's upside-down. I've seen that boulder every morning for twenty years and it was all mossed over—you notice little things like that when you pass 'em every day. You don't know how you know, but you do know if they've been stirred so much as an inch.

"You can smile, Sheriff — but watch the dog! She knows something's wrong!" For the animal, nosing around the rock, after one or two clumsy failures, dragged herself upon it and stood hunched, her fore and hind legs together. Throwing back her head, she uttered a long-drawn, dolorous howl.

"That is true!" June's awed voice suddenly corroborated the milkman. "That big stone was covered with moss yesterday morning. I was down here painting."

The sheriff turned to her alertly. "Is that stone in your picture?"

"Yes. And the river-bank and the cardinal-flowers——" She suddenly stopped short, for the cardinal-flowers in her picture were not the cardinal-flowers of the day before yesterday. They would laugh at her if she tried to tell them!

"Hold on to that picture!" he ordered. "I want a look at it."

"Certainly!" But she was glad of Carpenter's diversion.

"Look at the dog!" he interrupted, for Gretchen was pawing at the stone on which she stood uncertainly balanced and barking ferociously. "I wish we had a boat!"

"You think it's out there under that rock?" Selectman Springer asked incredulously.

"*Something's* there!" Carpenter was positive.

"There's a boat down under the bridge," the milkman told them. "Been there for five years. Belongs to old Mike Foley. May leak, though!"

"That doesn't matter. The river is shallow—not more than knee-deep in the deepest places. About a foot deep out where the stones are."

The milkman started down the river-bank, the sheriff and two selectmen following. Carpenter turned to June.

"My car is in the road at the head of the lane. You had better go to it and wait for us. We may find something you had better not see."

Again, as when she had looked at the crushed flowers in her picture, June found herself shivering. "A minute more and my teeth will chatter!" she thought disgustedly, and forced herself down on a flat stone close to the water.

"I'm something of a sportswoman," she assured him. "I'll wait here. Besides, I want my dog!"

Carpenter's quick glance of admiration sent the flame again into her cheeks. He hesitated.

"I don't like to leave you. Still I want"—he looked toward the river—"to go out there."

June was herself again now; the cowardly tremor passed. It was morning. The sun was shining. The river was all shimmering golden ripples and spent arrows. There was really nothing to fear, whatever had been, whatever might be out there now.

"Oh, please go!" She fished a little gold compact out of her jacket pocket and snapped it open. "I want to powder my nose!"

He laughed and went, looking back, though, with an encouraging wave of the hand before the bushes on the bend hid him from view. June had time to powder her nose and get a bit lonely before the boat shot into the sight from the bridge.

She clasped her hands over her knickered knees and leaned forward intently. They were so slow getting there! It seemed that two men should row faster. And when they reached the rock they were a long time doing nothing, just sat in the boat talking and looking down, while Gretchen barked her head off and pawed at the boulder.

"There! They were taking the dog into the boat, and she was trying to tell them, bless her heart! Barking and wagging and looking up into Mr. Carpenter's face and down into the water! Now what were they trying to do? Swamp the boat? Mercy, how it rocked! Oh! they were shoving the boulder! June jumped to her feet.

"Down, Gretchen!" she called, as the dog's intent face pushed over the boat-edge. "Lie *down!*"

She could stand it no longer. It simply wasn't possible to sit there and wait, like a *woman* and not *know*——

Out in the river, round stones, here and there, gleamed and sparkled in the morning sun—flat stones, boulders torn in some convulsion of nature from the mountain-sides. June, leaping nimbly from one to another, had almost reached the boat, when the big boulder stirred, rocked, and rolled over, its mossy head again aloft. She was near enough to hear Mr. Carpenter's shocked, "My God!" Near enough to see what they were all staring at—a man's hand that had shot up in the shallow water.

IV

JUNE was a good sportswoman, but she suddenly turned faint. The golden morning, the golden river, the massed splendor of green and red on its banks all ran together like a futurist painting. She sat down in a wretched huddle on the stone where she happened to be and shut her eyes not to see any more.

She didn't know what came next, whether it was the other hand or the head of Chloe's "man in de ribber," but she knew that they were getting up something, something clammy and gruesome that had been warm and living the day before yesterday. The men's voices told her the story.

"There! Can you get his shoulders? Now, pull!"

"His body's way down. How the dickens did the guy get him in so deep? We'll have to get shovels."

"No, wait! Use the oars!"

"Gently now! A little more on his right!"

"There! Now, pull again!"

"Hold onto the dog, somebody!"

"Here he comes!" There was a dripping sound and a heavy plunge as something was dragged over the gunwale into the boat.

June shut her eyes tighter and gripped her boulder. Her head was going round and round like a spinning-top. The men's voices whipped it on.

She heard Mr. Carpenter speak again. "It's old Rosenberg—the peddler. That guy that wanted the boxes said Rosenberg had sent him to me."

"There's your murderer, then!" the sheriff spoke with conviction.

"Sure thing! There's a button off his coat. Where's your button, Mr. Royce?"

"That's his, all right. Matches the rest, don't it? Torn right out of his left sleeve!"

"Do you think he was murdered for his money?"

"I don't know. Where's his pocketbook?"

"Here. It's empty!"

"No—here's something!"

"What is it? Let's see!"

"A picture. Why, it's the river and the lane back there with the red flowers. Pretty, ain't it? The old guy was some painter! Who'd have guessed it?"

"You can never tell!"

You never could tell! June clutched her boulder, but it was slipping — slipping — Old Chloe — the "man in de ribber," who came back and painted in the picture to show where he was—— You never could tell! There was a splash in her ears, a roaring, as if the river was rising up around her. She heard Gretchen bark, far away. And a voice, Mr. Carpenter's voice, far away, too!

"Miss Randolph! Good Lord!"

Then there seemed in the whole world nothing but water and sky,

sky and water, and a rocking motion that soothed like a lullaby, till she felt herself snatched up out of it like a child from its cradle and held tight, tight in somebody's arms.

"All right!" the voice soothed above her. "You're perfectly all right now, Miss June. Just lie back. Put your head on my shoulder. I'll have you in the car in a jiffy."

And then, ridiculous ignominy, June, artist and "sportswoman," realized that she lay, an inert bundle, on Alec Carpenter's arm, and that her cheek was brushing his tweed. She made a little struggling movement of protest.

"I can walk. Please put me down!"

But he paid no heed, only seemed to stride faster up the lane, past the crushed cardinal-flowers out into the highway, where the Buick car stood waiting.

He deposited her in the sedan solicitously and sprang in after her. A dripping dog followed and crouched at her feet, nibbling her shoe. June forced a smile.

"You're very good! Between us, Gretchen and I have caused you a lot of trouble."

"A lot of pleasure!" he corrected. "I've been wanting to know you for ever so long."

The surprising statement almost took June's breath away, but it went far toward restoring her. Her heart began to resume its normal beat and her brain cleared. It was all just a part of this terrible, ridiculous day. The sun shone, the dew glittered on the grass, the river purled over its pebbles, the birds twittered in the branches, and Mr. Carpenter was saying silly, delightful things.

"Why, I didn't know you had ever seen me until today."

He smiled at her omniscently.

"Sure. I drive past your little gray bungalow daily for that purpose."

"Oh!" June sat quite erect now, without the support of his arm. The delicious poppy-pink flared again in her cheeks, her pallor gone. "How perfectly absurd!"

"I'm sorry you consider it so"; the young man seemed hurt. "But it happens I'm a bit of an artist myself and your setting there sort of appealed, so I drove past. And then one day I saw you in your garden, with all those blue and pink flowers around you, so—well, after that I drove by to see all the flowers."

She was more like a pink poppy than ever in her delicate, transparent rose, but she ignored his compliment.

"You're a bit of an artist?"

"Does that surprise you? Even that poor man in the river could paint!" Then he caught himself up at sight of her face. "Forgive me for bringing *that* back. You should never have seen it. You should have gone to the car."

"No, no! That's all right. It wasn't he that upset me—it was terrible, of course, terrible, but it wasn't he—it was his picture. Mr. Carpenter, he had painted those cardinal-flowers just as I did, erect and tall, splendidly gorgeous!"

Carpenter's eyes questioned the wonder and fear in hers.

"Why, there's nothing to that, beyond the fact that he had an eye to beauty. You painted them. He painted them. *I* might have painted them."

"Yes, but, Mr. Carpenter——" June hesitated. It was hard to put into words. He would think her crazy, no doubt—"the next morning after I finished my picture, when I came to look at it, it wasn't as I left it. The cardinal-flowers had been wiped out and painted in again—broken, crushed, just as you saw

them today, with that single stalk afloat on the water. That is why I came down here today, to see if it was true!"

Her eyes, wide, frightened, appealing, held fast to his. For a minute he, too, felt the spell of fear. Then, with masculine resiliency, he shook it off.

"You got up in your sleep and retouched that part of your picture."

"Yes, but how did I *know?* The picture looks exactly as the riverbank looks today, except that, in my picture, it's sunset."

"Do you walk in your sleep?"

"I never did. But, Mr. Carpenter, what would take me back there in my sleep, if it wasn't what must have hapened since I was there day before yesterday? And how did I know anything had happened? How did I *know?*" the distressed question recurred in monotonous refrain. Her pallor had returned. Alec Carpenter put the Buick in high.

"You didn't know, not the conscious you," he groped back to an "applied psychology" course he had taken at the outset of his business career. "It was your subconscious mind pushing, in sleep, to the infinite. The subconscious mind," he elucidated learnedly, "is limitless, omniscient."

She did not seem convinced. The ripple of trouble on her brow deepened in transverse waves.

"But Chloe, my old colored mammy, who lives with me, saw it all in my picture. She said the 'man in de ribber' had come out of it to paint the broken flowers to show where he was. And, Mr. Carpenter, he could paint, he had painted those very cardinal flowers just before he was shot."

As a matter of fact the pedler had been shot in the back, but Carpenter recalled, with a shock of surprise, that the girl had not been told of the fact.

"But, Lord, *she* didn't do it!" he told himself. Then, beating in his brain, came her own question, "How did she *know?*" He was trying to convince himself as well as June, when he said:

"Suppose we just leave it this way, that somehow, some way, God gave it to you to bring the murderer to justice. Don't you remember your Shakespeare? 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio!' That mossy stone in your picture, the bright stone in the river fix the time of the killing pretty accurately and seem to fasten it on my customer for boxes." He had touched the right string. Her color came back slowly.

"Perhaps that is so!" she acquiesced, with a sigh of relief. Then, "I hope that it is so!" she added, a little less certainly.

THE Buick slowed to the bungalow gate. As if she wanted to be rid of all association with the scene that had passed, June unfastened the sedan door and stepped out before he could help her. The wet wolf-hound scrambled to his feet and leaped out after her, limping up the walk.

"Thanks very much!" she said hurriedly. "And Gretchen thanks you, too!"

But he would not let her go so quickly. He leaned out of the car.

"Won't you ask me in?" he smiled. "And show me your picture?"

She shook her head with a little shudder of aversion, but she returned his smile to show that the aversion was not for him.

"Not today! I don't want to look at it again today. Tomorrow, perhaps——"

He accepted his meagre bone with, perforce, contentment.

"Tomorrow, then!"

"Perhaps!" she amended after him.

But he came, nevertheless, on the morrow. She was paler than he wanted to see her, and quieter.

"I was just thinking of you," she told him, as she offered her hand.

A quick pleasure lighted his brown eyes, to pass as quickly on her next words.

" — because I was looking at my picture. Have they found the murderer yet?"

"I think so—the man who came to me for boxes and gave the dead man's name as reference. His own, he claims, is Dakin. The sheriff found Dakin in a hotel in Westfield. He had a roll of bills, but no luggage. Probably he cached the clothing somewhere.

"They found the pedler's horse and empty wagon in the woods a little off the Westfield road, which gave them the clue. A farmer heard the horse neighing. The brute had tied the animal to a tree and left it to starve. He had looted the wagon.

"He puts up a bold front and denies everything, even that he was in Woronoco Tuesday. He claims that he left town immediately after I refused his order for boxes. We find that the pedler left Russell on Monday, heading this way. It's strong circumstantial evidence, but not strong enough to convict our man unless he breaks down. And that's one thing I wanted to see you about today. The sheriff thought that, if he were confronted with your picture——"

June made a quick gesture of protest with both hands that pushed the suggestion from her with horror.

"Oh, no! I couldn't — really, I couldn't!"

Carpenter did not urge her. It really was too much to ask of the girl, after what she had been through!

"But you'll let me see it?" he hoped.

"Oh, yes! I want you to see it."

Carpenter didn't dare to feel flattered. It was probably like her "just thinking of him; a mere matter of association of ideas. She led the way up to the studio under the long slope of the bungalow roof. "Just an attic!" she apologized. "Done off with beaver-board. But there's a good skylight and a wonderful view from these windows."

Carpenter walked across, while she drew the curtain from her picture. There was indeed a wonderful view, from the glimpse of the Berkshires in the west away down the winding river. Nearer, he saw the red blot of cardinal-flowers against the sunlit blue of the water and the blue dome above. Midway in the shallow stream the big boulder gleamed like a headstone in the sunlight.

"Maybe that was the guy's idea!" he said to himself, and was surprised by her voice behind him.

"I've been thinking that, too! You may look now, Mr. Carpenter."

He wheeled. She had drawn the makeshift curtain of dark cloth aside and the picture, in its sombre lurid beauty and dark suggestion, seemed to leap from the canvas.

"By George!" he said. "It's the whole story. It's—why, Miss Randolph—June, it's *great*—I mean, *really* great, you know!"

She stood quietly beside him, so close that the fragrant sleeve of her gray pongee smock brushed his coat sleeve. He felt an irresistible impulse to reach out his hand, take hers—that inert little hand, hanging limply now at her side, the hand that had wronght this marvelous thing—to carry it to his lips, and do homage to genius.

"Yes!" she said unaffectedly. "I know it is. But I can't feel that I did it. I know you think I'm foolish, perhaps a bit out of my mind, but I reckon Mammy is right. I reckon the man in the river was the genius, not I. All I did, any artist could do. I just painted what was there—a beautiful sunset on a flaming lane. But he painted what was to be tomorrow—the *real* story."

She was too sure, and too high-strung, for Carpenter to argue the point then, but his healthy mind reacted against anything supernatural in the picture.

All geniuses, he supposed, were inspired, and the inspiration, the vital breath, to make of her painting a living scene, might have come to her sleeping as easily as waking. But it was her hand, not the pedler's, that had painted out the cardinal-flowers in their pride and painted in this crushed glory in the rushes.

"But if you feel that way," he suggested, after a minute, "you must feel that the pedler painted for a purpose, and that purpose must have been to unearth his murderer. Both Mr. Morehouse and I feel that the man Dakin, if brought suddenly on the picture, would break down and confess."

June's eyes, staring straight ahead of her, had gone traveling down the cardinal lane in her picture. At the far end of it they seemed to be looking at something, for they fixed and dilated. She caught Carpenter's hand in the little hand he had wanted to touch. And the hand was wet.

"Look! the boulder out in the river! I hadn't noticed——! I don't think it was like that this morning, or I would have noticed. It was moss-covered. And it's white now, white and *red!*"

Carpenter's eyes followed hers, and, for the life of him, he could not escape a tremor. It was certainly startling. As the boulder in the river had looked before he and Morehouse rolled it over, the picture boulder looked now. Only that red smear on its side which had brought Gretchen into the water was cunningly painted to show a touch of that same sunset ray that slanted, a blood-red arrow, up the lane.

It was weak and inadequate, Carpented knew, to say:

"It *must* have been that way, only you didn't notice it," but he said it, adding, with greater certainty, "You must have retouched the boulder when you painted over the flowers. Or, perhaps, last night——"

She shook her head sombrely.

"Oh, no! I didn't walk in my sleep last night, because I didn't sleep. I sat up all night, and Mammy sat with me."

"Then it must have been like that yesterday morning!" Carpenter repeated. But he felt like a man crossing a river on stepping-stones that slid under his feet. He made for firm ground.

"This man, Dakin, told a straight enough story and we could not shake it, though not a man of us doubts that he murdered the pedler. He claims that he had agreed to buy out Mr. Rosenberg and was to meet him here in town day before yesterday on the Westfield road to consummate the bargain. He showed a big roll of bills in proof of his story.

"But, remember, the pedler had been robbed. Dakin said he waited three hours on the appointed spot, but Rosenberg did not come, so at last he went on to Westfield, thinking he might find the pedler there. He impresses me as a hardened criminal; nerves of steel and a front of brass. He may get away with it, for nobody saw him commit the act."

June seemed to rouse. Her eyes came back up the lane, left the picture and leaped to Carpenter's in a blaze of almost golden illumination.

"He won't! God saw him!" she said. "I've changed my mind, Mr. Carpenter. You may bring him here, if you think that is the way."

But now, having the permission he had asked for, Carpenter felt suddenly loth. She was keyed dangerously high. And precipitation of another lurid scene might cause a breakdown.

"You may bring him," she repeated, "just as quick as you can! I want to get it over, so I can forget it all."

She spoke with another of those impatient little gestures of revulsion, and Carpenter, as he went downstairs, after a brief good-by, wondered if he were himself included in all that she wanted to forget.

V

CARPENTER was back in a scant half-hour with the sheriff and the prisoner, whose broad, good-humored face wore an air of smiling nonchalance that his watchful, crafty eyes curiously discounted. June recognized at a glance Carpenter's characterization—nerves of steel and a front of brass! The man might put it over. He would certainly never give himself away, unless taken by surprise, or frightened.

The sheriff took June apart.

"Mr. Carpenter told me what you think about your picture, Miss Randolph," he said, "and you may not agree with what I think. But I think I'm right. And I want you to stand by and keep quiet while I talk to the fellow. Don't butt in, please; just you look at him and let me do the talking. Then, when I nod my head to you, show him the picture. He doesn't know what we've brought him here for."

"Very well, Mr. Morehouse."

June's lips were dry and white. She moistened them with her tongue as she spoke. She, more than the prisoner, Carpenter thought with anxious pity, looked as if she were about to be put through the third degree. He went over and stood beside her, near the picture.

"Remember," he smiled, "you're a sportswoman!"

She smiled, too, though a flood of humiliation swept up her face. She caught herself up.

"Thanks! I was just slipping off my boulder again!"

The sheriff cleared his throat and faced the prisoner.

"Mr. Dakin," he began, "this lady here is Miss Randolph. Ever see her before?"

Dakin bowed awkwardly.

"Pleased to meet her; sorry about the circumstances. No, sir, not that I recalls."

"Well," the sheriff paused, to give due weight to the words to follow. "she has seen *you!* Now, Miss Randolph's an artist; that is, she paints pictures. And day before yesterday she went down that lane, where you dragged the pedler, and painted the river and the red flowers there on the bank."

"Don't know the place, I'm sure," said the man glibly, "but if it's pretty as the lady is, it's sure some scene!"

Carpenter made a stride toward the man, his hands clenched, but the sheriff interposed.

"You keep out of it, Mr. Carpenter!" he admonished. "Shut up, Dakin! I'm doing the talking. Well, Miss Randolph finished her picture, but she wasn't quite satisfied with it, because, see, there was something she wanted to get into the picture

she wasn't quite sure she had got right. So, in the night—day before yesterday night"—the sheriff's eyes seemed to bore into that smiling impenetrable mask—"she went down to the river again.

"She saw you come down the lane from the road, dragging the pedler's body across those pretty red flowers she'd been painting, and out into the river. She saw you strain and tug at the big boulder out there till you'd rolled it over—the boulder that was all green moss when she first painted her picture, and was white next morning.

"She saw you scrape a hole with one of old man Foley's oars in the river bed and jam the pedler into it, cover him over with river mud and little stones, then roll back the big boulder to keep the body down.

"She saw you slink away, up the lane, and take the Westfield road. Then she went home," he nodded to June, "and retouched her picture, putting the mark of Cain on it."

June pulled the curtain. The lurid sinister beauty, the silent, unimpeachable witness of the picture struck the man full in his face, which went livid. He shrank and put both manacled hands over his eyes to shut out that red gleam down the lane, the red finger pointing over the water to that telltale red splash on the white rock.

"God!" he appealed hoarsely.

His face distorted with rage and fear, he lunged forward, breaking away from the sheriff, and would have struck the painting with his handcuffs, doing irreparable injury, had not Carpenter sprung, too, and caught the force of the blow on his wrists. The blood spurted. "Oh!" cried June and pressed her handkerchief to the wound.

"That red lane's squealed on me!" Dakin screamed. "The old guy said 'twould cry out!"

IT SEEMED to June, after that, that she would never want to see the riverbank again. It seemed to her that she would always hate the gorgeous red of cardinal-flowers, that she would sicken at a brilliant sunset.

But, after a day or two the horror waned. The pedler faded out of the picture. Whenever she thought of the river, a well-knit youthful figure in gray tweeds came up out of it, striding over the stepping stones with herself in his arms. Alternately she flushed and frowned, and her heart quickened its beat.

The third day she revisited the spot. She sat down on the same flat rock from which she had watched the men in the boat and looked dreamily out to the boulder, not the boulder where the pedler had been buried, but her own boulder where she had sat huddled with closed eyes and tensely gripping hands, an absurd picture of a "sportswoman."

"Would it be safe to bid a penny for your thoughts?" Carpenter said behind her. "But you don't need to answer. You were thinking of me."

"How do you know?" She laughed and blushed as one caught in the act.

"Because," he smiled at her tenderly, "I was thinking of you. I was thinking how I carried you out of the river. It was next to the most wonderful moment of my life."

"And what is the 'most?'" she asked, a bit piqued.

"This!" and he swept her, unresisting, to his lips.

It was fully an hour afterward that June remembered the pedler.

"I wonder," she said, her flushed, happy face going sober, "if that poor old man really knows how happy we are?"

"Oh, by George, I'd forgotten!" Carpenter fished a paper out of his

pocket and spread it on his knee. "They found this in one of his pockets—the original letter, I mean —Mr. Morehouse let me copy it. You won't be interested in the first part, that reads like an itinerary. Begin down here," he laid a finger on the paragraph.

"Today I'm in Woronoco. I picked up a chap on the road that wants to buy me out. What do you think of it, daughter? I'm getting too old for the road, too old and too tired. It came to my mind today I wouldn't follow it much further.

"There's a beautiful spot here by the river where I always stop for dinner. I started a color sketch of it a year ago. Today I mean to finish it—great masses of cardinal-flowers deep in green rushes against the crystal of the river and the aquamarine of the August sky, and out in the river a big boulder that stands up like a headstone.

"I was here this same time last summer just at sunset. The red lights were gorgeous, unforgettable —but, alas! also unpaintable. A great bar from the sinking sun fell aslant the lane and just grazed the shoulder of the boulder. I tried to put this into the little picture, but I'm not satisfied with it.

"I'd like to paint the scene again some day on a larger scale and put into it what I felt about this place when I saw it at sunset—the bar sinister on the lane, a feel of something startling, unusual, of tragedy impending—reds of heaven in the rare beauty of earth and sky, reds of hell in the bar sinister on the lane, the big splotch of blood on the boulder.

"Perhaps, if I sell out to this man —but I dare say this is only another dream! Ah, me! My father was a good man, but he saw no profit in a painter's brush. He spoiled a good artist to make a bad business man. Well, goodby, daughter!

"Your little cakes were very good!

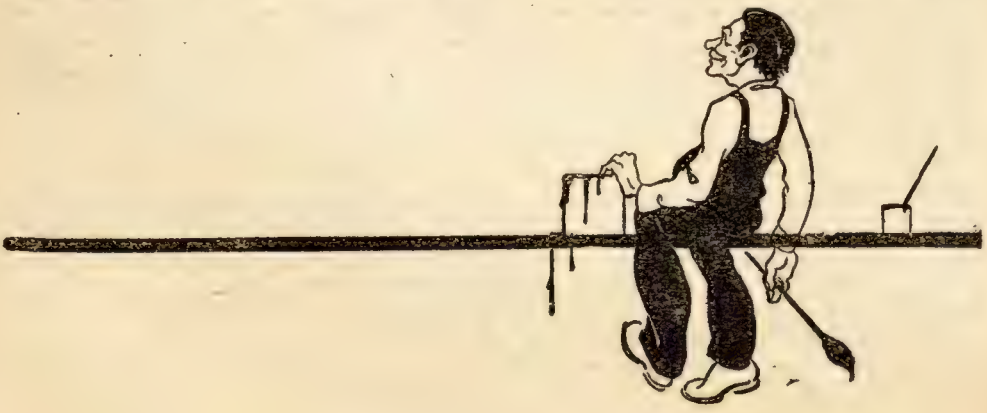
"FATHER."

Carpenter folded up the letter.

"The soul of an artist in the ill-fitting coat of a journeyman clothier. It sort of grates, though, doesn't it, to think that poor guy really saw in this place all that you saw in it, but died before he could paint it?"

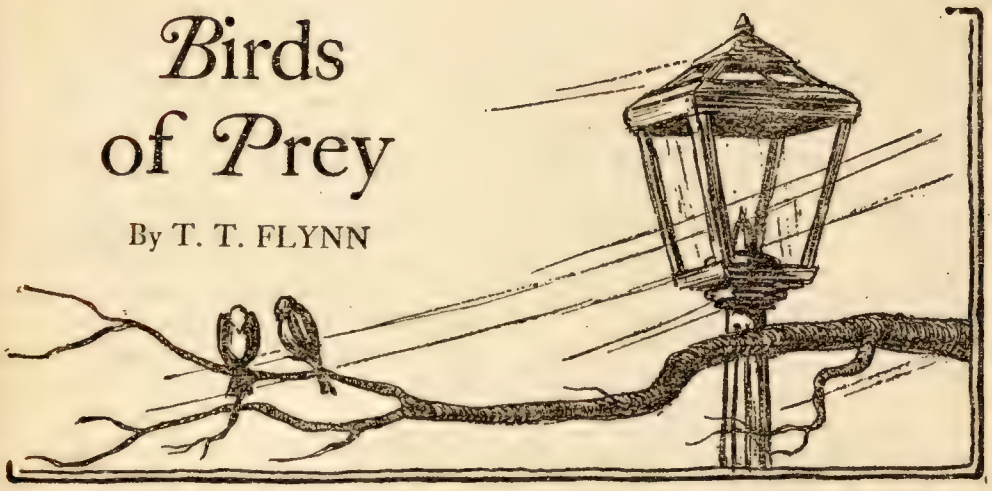
June sat very still, her hands lax on her knees, looking fixedly out over the water to the big boulder. And while she looked, again across its shoulder fell the crimson ray. The lane lit up with glory. She shuddered and looked away.

"Yes," she echoed his words with a slight, scarcely noticeable change. "He died before he painted it!"



Birds of Prey

By T. T. FLYNN



THE Sappee Valley turnpike was in bad shape. Even the most ardent Sappee Valley booster would have admitted that fact without parley. And the steady rain which drizzled upon the sodden landscape was not helping the situation in the slightest.

A long, low, lemon-colored roadster, minus the left back tire chain, skidded and slid through the thick wet clay. A large ridge loomed ahead. The driver shifted into second. The powerful motor roared, the gears whined. With the left back wheel spinning wildly the roadster churned a slow way to the top. It wallowed over the crest and started down.

The driver applied the brakes. They locked. The one chain was unequal to the emergency. The heavy car began to slide down the wet clay incline, completely out of control.

First to one side, then the other, it slid, missing the roadside ditches by inches. The driver called down anathema on Sappee Valley in general, and the pike in particular. As they went farther and faster, he closed his lips tightly and devoted himself to the task of keeping out of the ditches.

The little man at his side saw a sharp turn ahead and cried a warning. There was an agonizing moment of suspense. Then the turn leaped at them.

The front wheels took it—and the rear wheels slued around in a beautiful arc. Amid a spattering shower of dirty water and mud the rear end lurched into the ditch. The left rear wheel struck a large boulder and collapsed with a crash of splintering spokes.

The driver switched the motor off. Silence settled over the scene, broken only by the rush of water in the ditch and the patter of rain on the fabric top of the roadster.

Archibald Poe, the large, impressive-looking gentleman behind the wheel, was the first to break the damp silence. He turned an accusing eye upon his little, roly-poly partner, Mr. Doolittle, and said bitterly:

"I told you it was a fool idea to take a short-cut over this road, with the sky in the shape it was. If we'd

have stayed on the paved road we would have been in the state capital by now."

His words stung Mr. Doolittle into defense of the stand he had urged some forty miles back.

"You big clabberhead!" he retorted indignantly. "How could I know it was going to rain? That addle-pate at the gas station said this road was all right and that it cut off over forty-five miles."

"Yes—if it hadn't rained—and the road had been all right, we'd have saved a few miles—perhaps!"

"And if you had shifted into first like anyone with sense would, we'd have come down the hill all right!" snapped Mr. Doolittle. "You ought to hire a chauffeur!"

"Go hire a soap box," Archibald Poe advised ungraciously. "And now that we're here, what are we going to do about it?"

Once more the patter of the rain and the gurgle of muddy water in the ditch beneath were the only sounds that broke the dismal silence.

Mr. Doolittle sighed.

"Just where," he queried, "are we?"

Archibald Poe reached into the door pocket and brought forth a road book. After searching a moment he said glumly: "Somewhere near Sappee Springs."

Mr. Doolittle looked through the windshield down the stretch of desolate, muddy road ahead.

"Just how," he demanded pessimistically, "do you intend to get there? There's no boat handy, and I can't swim."

Archibald Poe looked also.

"There's a man coming this way," he stated after a moment. "Let's ask him."

The man, wearing a rubber coat, hat and boots, slogged stolidly through the muck until he was abreast of them. Mr. Doolittle opened the curtains on his side and called: "How can we get into Sappee Springs from here?"

The native inspected them with interest. "Reckon you can walk right on down this road. It'll take you there if you go far enough," he finally declared.

"No!" Mr. Doolittle stated with conviction. "It won't! Not if I have to sit here until the mud dries up! Anyone around here whom we can hire to take us into Sappee Springs?"

"Might get Henry Snodgrass to drive you in. He's 'bout the only one who lives around close."

"Where does he live?"

"'Bout a half mile ahead."

"Henry's our man," exclaimed Mr. Doolittle thankfully. He turned to Poe and said carelessly: "It won't take you long to walk down and get him."

"How do you get that way?" Poe retorted indignantly. "You got us into this mess! Now get us out!"

"You codfish! You were running this car! Go on and take your medicine!"

"Nix! It's up to you!"

A sudden thought struck Mr. Doolittle. He looked out at the booted and raincoated native. "Say," he said persuasively, "you wouldn't mind slipping back and asking Harry to stroll down this way with his car, would you?"

The native regarded him with an unfavorable eye. "I was goin' the other way," he stated without feeling.

"Ha, ha, that's right! I forgot!" Mr. Doolittle reached into his inside coat pocket and drew forth his wallet. Deftly he abstracted a dollar bill. "I don't suppose you are in a hurry," he suggested.

The native regarded the bill glassily.

"Right smart of a hurry," he answered.

Mr. Doolittle drew forth another dollar bill.

"You could spare us a few minutes, couldn't you?" he asked gently.

"It's a good bit of a walk back to Henry Snodgrass'."

A third bill joined the others.

The native visibly wavered, then steeled himself.

"Won't hurt you fellers to get your feet wet," he replied.

The rain drizzled steadily on the canvas top. Mr. Doolittle listened, then looked at the deep, gooey muck which stretched away into the distance. He sighed slightly, put the three one-dollar bills back in his wallet and abstracted a crisp new five.

"How about it?" he demanded.

"Well—ef you put it that way." The native took the bill, stowed it carefully under the raincoat, and slogged back the way he had come.

As Mr. Doolittle put the wallet away Poe said with a grin: "I guess you'll lay off short-cuts next time. Before I'd have paid that robber five bucks I'd have got out and walked."

"I wish you had to walk!" growled Mr. Doolittle. He lit a cigarette and settled down to wait the coming of Henry Snodgrass.

THAT gentleman was fairly prompt. He came skittering through the mud in a well known light touring car, stopped by the side of the wrecked roadster, shut his motor off, unbuttoned the side curtain, and looked across at the two partners.

"You the fellers who want to hire a ride into Sappee Springs?" he demanded.

The partners beamed upon him. "You win. We are," called Mr. Doolittle heartily, "and you certainly look good to us."

That last statement was rank flattery. Henry Snodgrass' sharp, hook-nosed features could have looked good to no person in the world but a fond mother. He surveyed them sourly and stated:

"It'll cost you fifteen dollars to ride into Sappee Springs!"

"What!" exclaimed the two partners in one voice.

"Fifteen dollars!" said Henry sharply. "Might be more if you got much baggage to carry along! This ain't no kind of weather to be gettin' a man out of his house! It's worth money, it is!"

"Say!" said Mr. Doolittle loudly. "Do we look like——"

Poe nudged him and hissed: "Look at that road before you queer things!"

Mr. Doolittle looked. Sight of the thick gumbo which stretched ahead caused him to conclude weakly: "——like men who would want you to do this for nothing?"

Henry retorted briefly: "Can't tell. There's all kinds in the world. Money in advance, please!"

"I suppose," Poe said with ominous politeness, "that our handbags can go without extra charge?"

"Handbags all you got?"

"That's all we wish to take."

"All right—I'll do it for fifteen dollars—in advance."

Poe looked at Mr. Doolittle expectantly. "Shell out, Dooey," he said.

"I'll see you for ten bucks!" retorted Mr. Doolittle wrathfully. "You've got to come in with the other five-spot—or I'll camp here all night."

"All right." Poe took out five dollars. Mr. Doolittle added ten to it and passed the money out through the rain to Henry. "Our bags are in the back," he said.

"You can get 'em while I turn around," Henry advised sourly.

Get them Mr. Doolittle did, standing out on the running board in the drizzle, unlocking the baggage compartment, and hauling forth two

hand-tooled leather bags. While he was doing that, Henry drove up ahead a few feet and, with much racing of his motor and grinding of bands, managed to get his car facing the other way.

He came as close as he could, stopped, and opened the rear door. Mr. Doolittle tossed the bags in, climbed in himself and Poe followed. Henry started the car with a jerk.

In a few minutes they rounded a curve. On the right, set well back from the road, a large frame architectural horror of the late nineties came into view.

Mr. Doolittle saw it through the curtains and asked of Henry's hunched back: "That your house?"

Henry nodded:

"Where did that fellow go whom we sent back after you?"

"Must have taken a short-cut," Henry answered without looking around.

At that moment the muck and mire gave way to a firm macadam road.

Mr. Doolittle sat erect and said tensely: "Good road! Just out of sight of our car!"

Poe half closed his eyes and a smile twitched at the corner of his mouth.

Henry put on speed. Within another half mile they reached the outskirts of a little town. Henry said over his shoulder: "This here's Sappee Springs."

"Stung!" Poe said softly to Mr. Doolittle. "Twenty bucks to ride a mile, Dooey."

Mr. Doolittle looked stunned.

Henry turned in before a weathered frame building and announced: "This here's the Biggs House."

The partners left the car and fled through the drizzle to the shelter of the front porch and the welcome of the front door. Mr. Doolittle entered first, still in the grip of emotions too deep for words.

The small lobby of the Biggs House was deserted save for a thin, colorless individual with a discouraged-looking mustache.

"Are you in charge here?" snarled Mr. Doolittle.

The colorless individual regarded the plump figure of Mr. Doolittle unfavorably, and replied tartly: "Guess I am. I'm B. B. Biggs, the owner."

Poe placed his well-tailored, impressive presence in front of Mr. Doolittle and smiled at B. B. Biggs.

"Could we get two rooms and bath?" he asked genially.

"Reckon so. I got 'em. All the rooms has the use o' the bath at the end o' the hall." B. B. Biggs hesitated, then asked: "Come with Henry Snodgrass, didn't you?"

"Yes."

B. B. Biggs fingered his discouraged mustache and queried with interest: "Henry bring you from the bottom o' the hill?"

"What do you know about the bottom of the hill?" Poe asked.

B. B. Biggs chuckled.

"Henry makes a heap of money out o' that hill," he replied, wagging his head. "Heap o' tourists takes a short-cut this way. Most every time they's a rainy spell some car hits that turn an' goes in the ditch. Some gets stuck, and some gets bunged up an' has to be hauled in.

"Henry keeps his hired man, Newt, watching. When a car gets in trouble, Newt walks by and lets on like they are way off, miles from anywhere. There ain't no signs, nor houses near, and they most always believe him. They's been moves made to put signs along the county road, but Henry always blocks 'em. He mighty nigh runs the county. Always gets what he wants."

There was a painful silence after Mr. Biggs finished. A deep red tint

surged up into Mr. Doolittle's plump cheeks. Poe asked thoughtfully: "Who is Henry Snodgrass? What does he do?"

"He's old Judge Snodgrass' son. The judge made a heap o' money in farm mortgages an' such. Henry got it all. He's clever as his pappy. If there's a dollar to be made Henry's right there on the spot. I reckon he's added a heap to the judge's money."

Mr. Doolittle's pent-up emotions suddenly overflowed.

"He's a——!" he began explosively. And then Poe's right hand swooped down, smote his shoulder with painful force and cut off speech.

"We'll register now, and go to our rooms," Poe said heartily.

They had worked together so long, understood each other's ways so well, that Mr. Doolittle realized something was in the air. He subsided, registered, and followed B. B. Biggs up the creaking, worn stairs to their rooms. But when their colorless host departed, Mr. Doolittle snapped hotly:

"You almost put my shoulder out of joint! Why didn't you let me have my say about that Ali Baba?"

Poe sat on the edge of the bed and grinned at his roly-poly little partner. "I smell money," he stated.

Mr. Doolittle regarded him suspiciously.

"Whose money?" he demanded.

"Henry Snodgrass'."

The clouds passed from the plump face of Mr. Doolittle. He drew a large breath of anticipation. "Spill it," he said happily. "I begin to feel good already."

Poe passed him a fat, expensive cigar, thrust the mate to it into his mouth, held a match for them both, and then began to talk. And the room was blue with fragrant smoke and the two imported cigars were reduced to dead stumps before their conversation came to an end.

ALTHOUGH it was after banking hours, Poe borrowed an umbrella and sallied forth through the drizzle to the Sappee Springs & Farmers Bank. Several raps on the door caused the cashier to leave his books, come forward and open it.

"Sorry to disturb you. But I want to open an account and get it in active shape as soon as possible," said Poe briefly.

The cashier, an elderly man, bowed by long hours over his figures, smiled and opened the door. "I will be glad to be of service, Mr. ——"

"Poe," supplied that gentleman, leaning the umbrella against the outside wall and stepping inside. "E. Archibald Poe, of Chicago."

The cashier closed the door and returned to his cage, asking amiably: "Going to settle around here, Mr. Poe?"

"Can't say. My plans are not fixed. I am transferring fifty thousand dollars in case I need it." He produced a check book and went to a wall desk.

The cashier peered uncertainly at his back.

"Fifty thousand dollars?" he uttered weakly.

"Yes. I think that is all I'll be apt to need on short notice." Poe blotted his check, tore it out and brought it to the window.

It was drawn on one of the largest banks in Chicago.

The cashier inspected it closely, then looked up as though to inquire whether it was a joke.

But nothing about the tall, commanding figure of Poe hinted of levity. From the iron-gray hair at his temples, down the length of his well-tailored form, every inch hammered home the fact that here was a man who was used to money, large

amounts of it. One to whom a fifty thousand dollar check meant little.

The cashier fingered the check respectfully, but the habit of years made him say: "I'll enter this for collection, and advise you when it can be drawn against."

Poe waved his hand. "No hurry," he remarked carelessly. "You can reach me at the Biggs House." He took the deposit slip the cashier made out, tucked it into a well-filled pigskin wallet, nodded gravely, and left the bank.

The front door had hardly closed upon his tall form before the cashier was at the phone, asking for the home of Henry Snodgrass. Things were happening in Sappee Springs, and, as the leading citizen and power of the bank, Henry was entitled to first report.

Fifty thousand dollars! Henry Snodgrass did not miss an inflection of the cashier's voice as it came excitedly over the wire. Fifty thousand dollars! And for a paltry fifteen dollars he had sold his chance at friendship with that large sum of money. It was a subject with room for sad thought.

The next morning, in the grimy office at the Mammoth Garage, which belonged to Henry, lock, stock and barrel, he was morosely pondering over his misstep when a voice came through the open door.

That voice! Henry's pulse quickened. He had heard it the afternoon before, when Poe spoke from the depths of the wrecked roadster. He went to the door quickly. Poe and his short companion were standing a few feet away.

Poe saw him and nodded in recognition.

"How are you, Snodgrass?" he asked heartily. "Who is the boss around here?"

Henry smiled thinly.

"Guess I am," he replied. "I own it."

"I'd like to find out how soon I can get my car. It was brought in yesterday evening for repairs. I need it to do a bit of running around in."

There was no hint of coolness in his manner. No recognition of the fact that the day before he had been trimmed as neatly as ever a sheep was sheared by a new pair of power clippers.

Henry looked sharply to see if his senses had betrayed him. They had not. There was not one thing out of the way in Poe's manner. Nothing that would bar the way to a closer friendship with the fifty thousand-dollar bank account.

Henry's sharp features twisted in a sour smile as he said: "I'll see the foreman about it, Mr. . . . "

"Poe is the name. And this is my secretary, Doolittle."

Doolittle nodded briefly. It seemed to Henry that there was a slightly unpleasant look in his eye, as though he knew things that his master did not realize.

Henry turned away hastily, to get the verdict from his foreman.

In a minute he was back. "There's a new wheel coming in on the five. They'll have it on in a jiffy when it gets here."

Poe frowned slightly.

"I need a machine right away. Have a great deal to do—and not much time to do it in."

"Perhaps we can rent a machine," Doolittle suggested deferentially.

"We'll have to." Poe looked at Henry. "Got one to rent?" he demanded.

Henry blinked and thought rapidly. "Well . . . I dunno. We don't keep one for that purpose. But I'm not going to use my car all day. You can take it."

Poe acknowledged the favor with a nod. His secretary asked casually: "What will the charge be?"

Henry fought a quick, sharp battle on the spot. His common sense won over his pocket sense. He rubbed the palms of his hands, smiled and said as heartily as he could: "Won't be no charge. If you're going to settle around here I'm glad to be neighborly."

"Mighty decent." Poe took a fat cigar from his pocket and tendered it to Henry. And though Henry's usual smoke was a Pittsburg stogie, it did not need the flaming gold band nor the aroma of the tobacco to tell him that the gift was rolled from the purest Havana leaf, at a cost which would make a sizable dent in a dollar bill. It had to be. A man like Poe would carry no other kind.

"Thanks. I'll smoke it Sunday." He carefully tucked the cigar in his breast pocket. "What business are you in, Mr. Poe?" he then asked.

"The bird business."

"Bird business?"

"Yes?"

"Oh—I see. Chickens?"

Poe smiled blandly.

"In a manner of speaking. Now, if you are not using your car, I'll be about my business."

"It's down in front o' the bank. I'll be glad to drive for you."

"Thanks—but I am a good driver." Poe spoke suavely but Henry sensed that his presence was not desired.

He guided them to his car, watched them climb into it, and stood on the curb while they rattled off, then went into the bank thoughtfully. Fifty thousand dollars—chickens—and what? And was there anything in it for the pocketbook of Henry Snodgrass?

DURING the day the little car carrying Poe and Doolittle ventured out on the rapidly drying roads leading into Sappee Springs. Now and then it stopped and Poe and Doolittle studied the surrounding land.

No less than six persons saw them plainly at different points. But not one of the six could swear as to what they were looking at or talking about. In the late afternoon they brought the car back and turned it over to Henry.

The next day, in the great roadster, the two again went out. This time they visited the owners of certain farms. To each astonished man Poe stated that he wished to purchase an option on certain large fields.

He offered one hundred dollars for a thirty-day option. If he desired to buy, the price would be well over the market value. If not, the option money would be so much clear gain. Seven farmers signed binding options.

Seven hundred dollars for the privilege of paying an exorbitant price for none-too-good farm land. A choice morsel that! By nightfall it was rolling busily under most of the tongues in Sappee Springs and the surrounding countryside.

But, if seven options were not enough, the events of the next three days were enough to make the most hardened reason totter. It was summer. The town was plentifully supplied with boys of various ages and sizes, in various stages of idleness.

Doolittle, acting for Poe, rounded up a half-dozen expert kite fliers. Each boy and his kite was hired for five dollars a day.

Five dollars a day for boys whose fathers were glad to work for two-and-a-half and three. Five dollars for flying a kite! For that was what Poe put them to doing. He loaded all six on the running

boards of his lemon-colored roadster and transported them into the country. From different parts of the optioned fields, Poe had them put their kites up.

Poe himself strolled around from boy to boy, a pair of binoculars in his hand, his secretary near with the ever-present notebook and pencil. Now and then Poe would study the different kites closely, then dictate. Doolittle would write.

Gradually, in each successive field, Poe's expression became more serious. In each field he finally shook his head and said regretfully: "It won't do, Doolittle. I am afraid it won't do."

Three different boys heard him say those very words. And from three different families they spread to every other family.

Henry Snodgrass was affected more than any other person. He possessed a large level field which had been straight-cropped until the life was out of the soil. Much money would have to be spent for fertilizer before the land was worth anything. Crop prices did not warrant such an outlay. It was in poor grass, and the lost interest and taxes were not met by the grazing fees.

Hopefully Henry waited for Poe to drop in, ask for an option, and leave one of the crisp new hundred-dollar bills behind. Poe did not appear, and Henry grew so crabbed that he cut Mrs. Snodgrass' house allowance five dollars for the week, and then reduced her to tears when she served him round steak instead of porterhouse.

Finally, the forenoon of the second day, Henry climbed into his car and set off to see what he could do about the matter.

He located the lemon-colored roadster in the road outside Sam Clark's pasture. Several other cars were parked there also. Scattered along the ancient rail fence was a goodly company of men and boys and even women. They were breathlessly watching six small boys, six kites, E. Archibald Poe, and his secretary, Doolittle.

Henry stopped his machine and stared also. The kites were swaying at different heights above the ground. The same sky, the same kind of atmosphere, the same style of kites that he himself had flown in his boyhood! Not a thing different!

Yet Poe lifted his binoculars and watched the different kites intently, then shook his head and spoke to his secretary. The little man wrote busily. And then the two of them walked toward the boy who was standing nearest the rail fence.

Henry pressed his thin lips together, clambered out of the car, climbed the rail fence, and set out for the boy also.

Poe got there first, and stood sighting through his binoculars up along the kite string.

Doolittle gave Henry a sharp glance when he came up. He said shortly: "Mr. Poe is occupied."

"I want to speak to him jest a minute."

Doolittle frowned. Poe took the glasses from his eyes, turned, and frowned also.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Poe," Henry said hastily. "I just wanted to speak with you a minute."

Poe said to the boy: "Let out about thirty feet more of string." Then, to Henry, "I'll have to ask you to be brief. My time is rather limited."

"Yes, yes, I know." Henry rubbed his hands together and plunged to the heart of the matter. "I've got a right nice field, Mr. Poe. Just the thing for you."

"How do you know it is just the thing for me?" Poe asked sharply. "How do you know what I am looking for?"

"Well . . . I don't exactly. But there ain't a better field in this part of the valley."

"I'll look at it and see whether I can do anything with it."

"Ah—I reckon you'll want an option on it?"

"I guess so. Doolittle, have you one of those option blanks in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir." Doolittle produced a folded paper.

"Fill it out."

While Doolittle was writing with his fountain pen, Poe produced a fat pigskin wallet, abstracted a new hundred dollar bill, and held it forth.

"I suppose you'll let the land go for two hundred dollars an acre?" he queried.

"Yes," said Henry, clutching the bill convulsively. "I reckon that'll be all right with me." His beady eyes glittered as he thought of an offer of seventy-five dollars an acre which he had been considering seriously. He signed the option, shook hands with Poe, and left hastily.

Early afternoon brought the lemon-colored roadster and the kite flyers. Henry met them, guided them down the road, through a short lane, and into the large, flat pasture of poor grass. The grass closely cropped by sheep made it look like a great lawn.

Poe got out and surveyed it with satisfaction.

"Nice-looking tract of land," he remarked.

Henry's thin face crinkled in a smirk, as he agreed: "One of the best fields I've got. Almost hate to part with it."

"You might not be called on to do so," Poe warned. "I'll have to test it. Later in the afternoon I can tell you more." Leaving Henry by the roadster, he led his crew of kite flyers forth.

Henry sat crouched on the running board of the roadster, his beady eyes taking in every move, hope rising and ebbing in his thin breast.

Poe watched the kites for a full half hour, and then strode toward the roadster. He halted in front of Henry Snodgrass, reached down, seized Henry's hand, and pumped it heartily.

"You are to be congratulated, Mr. Snodgrass!" he cried heartily. "Fortune has smiled upon us all. Upon you, me, and Sappee Springs in general."

"Eh?" gasped Henry.

"Good fortune! Progress!"

"What kind o' good fortune?"

Poe smiled mysteriously.

"I am not at liberty to tell you yet. I will say that I am going to buy this land—as soon as I can get around to it. It is just what I want." Poe chuckled. "I'm mighty glad that you reminded me to take an air-tight option on it," he declared. "If I hadn't, and you had changed your mind, I would have been forced to pay almost any price to get it. As far as I can see this is the only tract of land around here that will suit my purpose. I would have paid pretty high for it, Snodgrass; pretty high."

Pretty high! As Henry crouched on the running board, gall and wormwood began to ooze through his heart. A dim, misty fear which had been lurking along the borderland of his mind drew in and took definite shape. Somehow, in some way, his eagerness for the dollars at hand had cost him a chance at far larger stakes.

Stricken, Henry rose to his feet, watched Poe take his place at the wheel, the boys mount the running boards, and the car purr down the lane.

Fifty thousand dollars! And Poe

had him bound tight and helpless with a suit-proof option. Henry scowled at the ground, saw a grasshopper, stamped on it viciously, and then tramped toward his house, muttering.

That same afternoon Poe boarded the five o'clock train for the State capital.

HENRY spent a bad night. In the morning he ate a snatch of breakfast, kicked his wife's cat clear across the room, and went out to quarrel with his hired man.

He did that successfully, hit a stray dog in the side with a stone, and then took his gun and went out to shoot crows. Nothing short of red blood appealed to Henry that morning.

Several crows had fallen before his shots and he was lurking in the shelter of a fence corner, when the large lemon-colored roadster rolled down the lane and stopped at the gate to the pasture.

Henry stood up and went toward it, to see if he could learn anything to his advantage.

Doolittle, hatless, rumpled of hair, was behind the wheel of the big car, alone. As Henry neared, Doolittle lifted a bottle to his lips, threw back his head, and pulled heartily at it. When Henry reached the side of the car Doolittle held the bottle out and invited thickly—"Have a slug, ol'-timer!"

"Don't drink," Henry said sourly. He rested the butt of his gun on the ground and surveyed Doolittle.

A great change had come over the little man. His usually neat hair was disorderly, his cheeks flushed, his gaze loose. More than half the quart bottle was gone, and a vagrant gust of wind enfolded Henry in the pungent atmosphere of a distillery.

Henry's sharp, hooknosed features grew sharper yet. His beady eyes raked Doolittle speculatively.

He probed gently: "Seems to me I heard that Poe took the five o'clock last evening. Have very important business to attend to?"

"Birds," replied Doolittle. He leaned back in the seat and chuckled. "Jes' birds." He laughed outright until his roly-poly sides shook.

"There must be money in birds," Henry suggested.

"More money in suckers."

"Eh?"

"Suckers," repeated Doolittle. He began to laugh again. "If you knew what I know," he declared, "you'd sit down an' cry your eyes out."

Henry grimaced doubtfully. "What do you know?"

Doolittle drew a folded paper from his inside coat pocket.

"Poe made a sucker out o' you," he declared boastfully. "Paid you hundred dollars an' you signed. Jes' like a sucker. Ought to have found out first. You could have got lots more. Thousan's an' thousan's an' thousan's an' thousan's an' thousan's . . ."

"What for?" asked Henry harshly. "What's he going to do with the land that'd make it worth so much? Ain't no land in this part of the valley that's worth so much. Leastways unless it's fine coal lands, or some such. And there ain't coal within a hundred miles o' here. What's he want the land for?"

"Birds."

"What kind o' birds?"

"Not crows. Poe said you reminded him of an old crow." Doolittle leaned over the side and regarded Henry with interest.

Henry flushed.

"Yesh. Said it looked like you had picked Sappee Springs clean—an' he was glad to get a little of your meat."

"He'd better look out what he says," snapped Henry viciously. "There's a law against slander."

Doolittle yawned.

"I suppose so," he agreed. "But Poe's got too much money. His lawyers take care of anything like that."

While they had been talking a slight hum had penetrated the air. It gradually grew louder. The drone of powerful motors became recognizable.

"Airplanes," remarked Henry, peering up. "Two of 'em."

The planes drew closer. Doolittle got out of the car and began to wave his bottle wildly at the planes, then almost overhead.

As though he was directing them, one, then the other, banked in a large circle over the field.

Doolittle whooped, ran out toward the center. His legs got tangled up and he fell down. Was on his feet in a minute and continued on doggedly, if not quite in a straight line.

Henry watched, his lower jaw hanging slack.

Around the field the two planes swooped. They came lower and lower. On the far side of the field one of them suddenly straightened out and began to glide toward the ground. The other did the same. Their motors stilled. They rushed toward the large level pasture in sudden silence, broken only by a shrill whine as their wings cut through the air.

First one, then the other, lit near the center, bounded gracefully, came down more gently, slowed to a stop.

Doolittle ran toward them, waving his bottle.

Henry swallowed, leaned his gun against the side of the car and followed.

Out of one of the planes two figures climbed. Out of the other, one. Muffled in leather helmets, large goggles, and leather coats, they were unrecognizable. Doolittle, waving his bottle, ran up to one of them, seized his hand and pumped it madly.

The stranger jerked his hand free and stepped back a bit.

Doolittle offered his bottle. The other shook his head. Doolittle insisted.

Henry arrived, panting, just as Doolittle urged: "Musht drink to success! Conquering hero — Mr. Archibald Poe, preshident of the . . ."

The stranger silenced him with a peremptory gesture, then undid the strap of his flying helmet and stripped it and his goggles off. Henry suppressed a gasp as he surveyed the features of Archibald Poe.

Poe eyed Doolittle's rumpled hair, flushed face and soiled suit.

"Are you drunk again?" he demanded sternly.

Doolittle drew his short form up with dignity and declared: "Shertainly not! Just spif—spif—spifli-cated a little!"

The pilot of the other plane had joined them. He chuckled.

"This is no laughing matter," Poe said sternly. "I ordered you not to take another drink while you were in my employment!" he barked to Doolittle. "Here I find you drunk as a hog!"

"I inshist on respect," said Doolittle firmly.

Poe reached out, took the bottle from Doolittle, pulled the cork, turned the bottle upside-down and began to pour the contents out on the ground.

Doolittle uttered a cry of protest. When Poe did not stop he leaped forward and tried to get the bottle back.

Poe repelled him.

In sudden drunken rage Doolittle swung at his employer with his fists.

Poe shifted the bottle to his left hand and gave Doolittle a mighty push with his right. The little man staggered back and sprawled on the ground. Poe tossed the empty bottle to one side and surveyed Doolittle with contempt.

"This is the end!" he snapped. "I have put up with your sprees for the last time! You are discharged! Take my car back to the hotel, get all your papers in order, and when I come back tomorrow I will pay you off!"

Doolittle got to his hands and knees, then his feet. He stood uncertain for a moment. "You firing me?" he asked.

"Yes! I have warned you time and again, but every time my back is turned you drink. You are going to cost me a great deal of money some day! I won't risk it!"

Doolittle sobered visibly. His plump cheeks quivered. He said earnestly: "Won't take 'nother drink as long as I live, Mr. Poe. This is the last time!"

"I know it is!" Poe told him grimly. "The last day you work for me! Get your papers ready, so you can turn them over to me as soon as I come tomorrow!" He turned away and the pilots followed him.

Doolittle clenched his fists. His face set. Flushed with anger, he suddenly shook his fist at Poe and shouted: "You'll be sorry!"

Poe did not turn his head.

Doolittle shook his fist again, turned and went toward the roadster, muttering to himself.

POE and his two pilots walked away from the planes out over the pasture. Poe talked, pointing here and there. The pilots listened and nodded now and then.

Henry stood by the planes, watching. His sharp face was aquiver with excitement. His beady eyes darted to and fro, taking in everything. The planes interested him. But Poe and the two pilots interested him more. He watched every move they made.

From one side of the field to the other they went. Poe pointed to the ground, the sky, and the surrounding country, talking briskly all the while. The pilots listened closely.

Henry wallowed in a great sea of disconnected thoughts. Birds—planes—his pasture! Where was the connection? Where was there an opening for him to insert a finger of advantage?

When the three returned to the planes Poe nodded to him.

"Hello, Snodgrass," he said affably. "I am glad to say my chief pilot and his assistant find everything all right. I'll drop in on you in the morning and fix everything up. You might have the papers made out. I'll be in a hurry."

Henry nodded and wet his lips. "Thought you was goin' to raise chickens," he ventured.

Poe smiled as he slipped his helmet on.

"Birds, Snodgrass," he corrected. "Birds." He turned to his plane, put his foot on the step and clambered into the cockpit.

The pilots began to warm the engines up. Henry put his fingers to his ears as the powerful motors droned.

Finally the motor of Poe's plane exploded in a staccato roar.

The plane quivered, moved and lumbered off. To the end of the field it went, turned and roared back over the turf. The wheels

rolled lighter, left the ground; it took the air.

The other plane did the same.

They circled the field twice and then pointed their noses back the way they had come.

Henry watched them fade into the depths of the sky. At last he returned to the roadster.

Doolittle was sitting on the running board, gazing blackly after the planes. As Henry came up the little man shook his fist at the sky and said bitterly: "I'll fix you!"

"Reckon he fixed you all right," Henry remarked with malicious satisfaction.

The shock of the dismissal had sobered Doolittle a great deal. He scowled. "The big stiff! He'll be sorry before I'm through with him!" he said savagely.

Henry regarded Doolittle with interest. "Goin' to fix him, hey?"

"Yes! He won't forget me!"

"How you goin' to do it?"

"I've got a way!"

"Poor man can't do much to a rich man."

"He can't, eh?" Doolittle thrust his hand into his inside coat pocket, pulled out a paper, and shook it at Henry. "See that?" he demanded.

Henry did. It was the paper he had signed the day before. The option which gave Poe the right to buy the tract of land they were standing on at a stated price. A price which Poe himself had declared was ridiculously low. He nodded sadly.

"I'll club him with it!" Doolittle threatened angrily. "I've got it! Let him try to get his hands on it tomorrow! It will cost him something! And he's got to have it, or lose a pile of money!"

"Don't see why. I've promised to sell the land."

"Don't kid me!" Doolittle said rudely. "I've got you sized up, old-timer! You'd take the pennies off a dead child's lids if you had the chance! You know about how valuable this land is to Poe! If he can't produce this option you'll stick him for his heart's blood! I know that!"

"I don't like your words."

"Don't try any of that holier-than-thou stuff! I've got your number from away back. So has Poe. I'll stick him about five thousand dollars! You'd try to get every cent of the fifty thousand he put in your bank! And he would have to pay it! He's got to have this land!"

"What for?"

"Birds! Haven't you got any brains? Airplanes! Poe is the president of the Consolidated Air Transport Company. Have you hicks been asleep the last few years? Don't you know the air is the railroad of the future? The Consolidated is the largest company of its kind in the world—a ten million dollar corporation. They already run air lines in Europe. Now they are starting in this country. That's what Poe is doing now."

"B-b-but, what's he want with my field?" babbled Henry.

Doolittle sighed.

"Dumb," he remarked with a shake of his head. "The man isn't out of the stone age. Don't you know that air lines have to have landing fields? They need 'em all along their routes. Suppose one of their great passenger or freight planes had to come down in this part of the valley? They'd have to have a good field to come to. One with a hangar, repair shops, and all that. And one with the right kind of atmospheric conditions, so they can come down and go up all right."

A great light broke on Henry. The bits of the puzzle which had been pounding at his brain for the

last few days suddenly took a leap and fitted together neatly. Birds—airplanes—kites—air currents! Options! No wonder the man had been willing to risk a few hundred-dollar bills when they gave him control of all the land he might desire to buy. Ten million dollars to draw on—and he, Henry Snodgrass, whose business ability was known everywhere, had been roped in.

"Poe skinned me," he said sadly.

"No," Doolittle retorted, "he outsmarted you. And now I'm going to out-smart him. I guess I'm entitled to a five thousand-dollar profit after all the work I've done for him, and after he kicked me out like this." He scowled blackly at the thought.

Henry's beady eyes fastened on the option which Doolittle clutched in his hand. A flash of inspiration coursed through his brain. His eyes glittered. His bony, hook-nosed face twitched. He agreed slyly. "Yep, he kicked you out all right! Ought to get back good an' proper at him."

Doolittle nodded sullenly.

"Wonder how much you'd take for that option," Henry uttered softly.

The little man eyed him sharply.

"So that's the way the wind blows," he remarked with a sneer. "Want to get a crack at him yourself, eh?"

"Well, he called me a crow," Henry admitted, smiling thinly. "I'd like to fix him for that."

"And grab all the money in sight."

"What's that to you?" Henry argued. "You want to get back at him."

"That's right," Doolittle agreed after a moment. "I don't give two whoops what happens to him after I get mine. The worse the better. So you really want to buy the option?"

"I was thinking of it—if the price ain't too high."

"It'll cost you five thousand bucks," Doolittle said bluntly.

"I can't pay that much," Henry said hastily. "I'm a poor man."

"Hot air! I heard you own half the county."

"You heard wrong."

"Five thousand berries," Doolittle said grimly, "or I'll deal with Poe myself. I'll get it from him, too." He thrust the paper into his inside coat pocket, got up from the running-board, and slipped behind the steering wheel.

Henry reminded him desperately: "You ain't thought of what Poe did to you! Ain't it worth something to get back at him?"

"Go cry in your mill-pond!" Doolittle advised ill-naturedly.

"Listen," said Henry agitatedly. "Couldn't you make it three thousand?"

Doolittle let the clutch in and the car began to move.

"Four thousand," begged Henry, walking along by it. "That's all the money I can get together."

Doolittle went faster. Henry had to trot to keep up.

"Four thousand five hundred," he offered with a wrench.

Doolittle gave him not a glance. Increased the pace of the car.

"All right," Henry agreed desperately, jumping on the running-board. "I'll give you five thousand. Where is the paper?"

"Where is the five thousand?" Doolittle said sharply.

Henry sighed.

"Drive to the bank," he said. "I'll get the cash."

They drove to the Sappee Springs and Farmers' Bank. Henry went in. He returned in a few minutes with a packet of fifty one-hundred-dollar bills. Doolittle counted them carefully. Then took the option out

of his pocket and gave it to Henry.

Henry assured himself that it was the paper he had signed.

"All right?" asked Doolittle.

"Yep. I reckon so," Henry admitted, clutching the paper fondly.

Doolittle stepped on the starter, shifted gears and drove on.

Henry watched the car move down the street in the direction of the Biggs House. Gradually a wolfish smile of anticipation crept over his hook-nosed features. He drew a match from his pocket, struck it, and held the flame to the edge of Poe's option. The paper flared up, disappeared in flame and ash.

Fifteen minutes later found Henry leaning against the front of the bank, looking on a rose-hued world, dallying with the thoughts of the profits which would shortly pass into his waiting pockets. Fifty thousand dollars of Poe's money reposed in the vault of the bank. Fifty thousand! Of course that was an excessive sum, but then Poe had to have the land. . . .

At that moment Henry turned his head and saw the great, lemon-colored roadster coming toward him. Doolittle was at the wheel; a neat Doolittle once more, sober without doubt.

The little man drove near the curb, slowed and called:

"When it rains—don't forget me!" He grinned, blew a kiss, and drove on down the street which led on and on to the state capital.

A queer fellow, but one who had served his purpose. Henry smiled at the thought. Doolittle now belonged to the past. In the sweet future was fifty thousand dollars. Henry closed his beady little eyes and dreamed and dreamed.

LATE that afternoon Mr. Doolittle entered the lobby of the best hotel in the state capital. Before he reached the desk the tall figure of Archibald Poe rose from a chair and met him. Mr. Doolittle stopped and grinned.

"I pried five thousand dollars out of Henry Snodgrass, and left him standing in front of the bank, guarding the fifty thousand and waiting for you," he said with a chuckle.

Poe chuckled also.

"Fine! I paid those free-lance pilots yesterday with checks against that fifty thousand — and then checked the rest out through one of the city banks. Let the dried-up little crook wait for me—and try to earn his five thousand back by hauling suckers from the bottom of the hill."

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THE vampire was a dead person who returned from the grave in spirit form to suck the blood of a living person, and so delay corruption indefinitely. As this ghostly leech filled its own veins, the victim from loss of blood pined away and died.

Vampirism was epidemic in character. When one instance was found, there were sure to be others, for the victim was attacked by a similar craving for human blood which extended even after the body was laid in the grave.

When suspicion pointed to the presence of a vampire, search was made in the neighboring graveyard. When the earth over a grave was found to be disturbed, the corpse under it was dug up and examined. It was usually found to have every appearance of merely being asleep, the complexion fresh and ruddy, the skin soft, the joints flexible, and the veins so charged with blood that sometimes the body lay in a pool of it. The shroud was torn and bore signs of exposure.

THE method of dealing with the pest was this: A stake of thorn or aspen wood was driven through the chest and heart, as in the custom of nailing suicides to earth so that their ghosts would not walk. The supposed corpse squirmed and screamed as the blood spurted. To make sure the vampire was truly laid, the head was cut off and the body burned.

Instances of this kind of haunting are numerous and attested to by every degree of authority, and for a time it was epidemic in Hungary and Serbia.

A herdsman in a Bohemian village died and was buried. Soon after, several people were attacked during the night by something which tore at their throats and they died. One of them managed to relate that the thing bore the appearance of the dead herdsman. The body was dug up and found untouched by the worm. A stake was driven through the corpse, which was reburied. The vampire was not settled, however, for another victim

fell to him. The body was dug up once more and delivered to the common hangman, who put it in a cart to be burnt outside the town. The thing in the cart as it was being conveyed shrieked in the most hideous manner and flung arms and legs about. The executioner beheaded the corpse and consumed it to ashes, whereupon the haunting of the village ceased.

A SOLDIER quartered in a Hungarian village one day saw a stranger come into the house in which he was lodged and sit down. The master and others at table were apparently terrified, but said nothing. Next day the master died suddenly, and the soldier, asking questions, was told that his death had been foretold by the stranger, who was no other than the spectre of the landlord's father come from the grave to give this notice.

The soldier related the story to his comrades, and it came at length to the colonel's ears. He commissioned a captain to make inquiry and take evidence before a notary. The family of the landlord and certain inhabitants of the village who had seen the appearance swore to the truth of the story.

The captain then in the presence of a surgeon had the body of the father, dead for ten years, exhumed, and, finding it fresh with fluid blood in the veins, had it beheaded.

OTHER vampire stories being sworn to before the board of inquiry, search was made in the graveyard. The grave of a man buried thirty years before was opened and the corpse found fresh. A great iron nail was driven through the temple. A third vampire was unearthed and burned.

The report on these cases being made, it was forwarded to the Emperor, who sent a special commission of officers, surgeons and lawyers to inquire into the matter even more fully, and complete verification of these facts was obtained.

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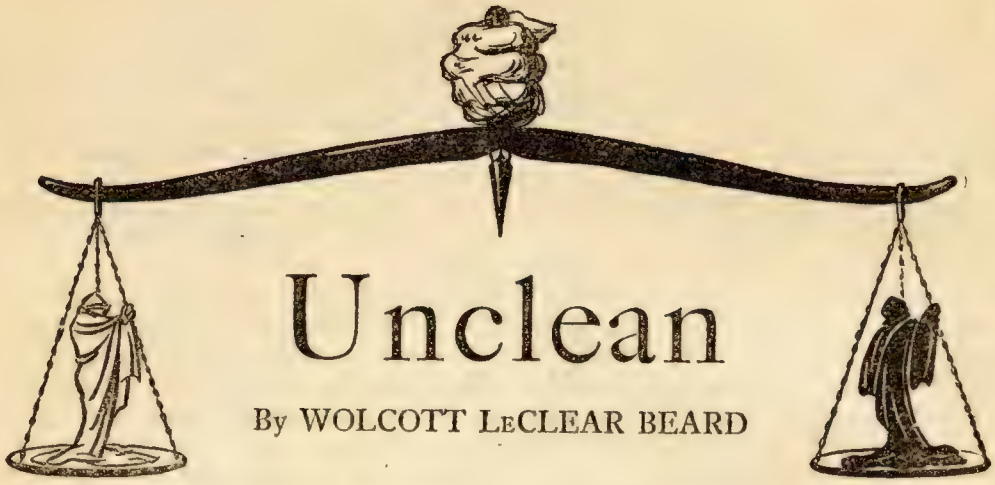

Unclean

By WOLCOTT LeCLEAR BEARD

EVEN as he crossed the border, reëntering the province of which he was Supervisor, rumors of trouble began to buzz in Jimmy Varnham's ears. He had feared all along that trouble might come. But, for once and for a wonder, the responsibility for whatever might happen would not rest officially upon him.

This was the reason why he went on leave and took Lois, his wife, to the Benguét hills. It also was the reason why he cut his leave short and now was riding alone on his homeward way.

The two foregoing statements are not paradoxical, as perhaps they might seem. Jimmy hailed from Massachusetts. The New England conscience is a fearful thing.

The rumors strengthened as Jimmy's journey neared its end. By the time he stopped in Suál for tiffin, they had crystallized into one of those half-baked prophecies which seem to spring spontaneously from those peoples in times of great emotional stress.

Before he finished his meal the same words had been repeated a dozen times by as many individuals, none of whom could account for or explain them.

"The unclean body follows toes that it faces, and goes to pay for its sins."

It was like the chorus to some silly song. No, more like those wheezes that the old Roman oracles used to spring, hiding sinister hints in ambiguous tommyrot.

"Unclean."

Naturally — and especially just now—that would mean a leper. As for the rest of that gibberish, it presumably had some significance, but what? It might be, very probably would be, important to know. Jimmy grunted with impatience because he failed to make sense of it, and fretted as he rode on through the outskirts of Lingayén, the little provincial capital in which he lived.

He was not surprised to see that most of the table-legged houses that he passed were closed and apparently deserted. Manila, which is to the provinces what Washington is to the States, had decreed that all lepers should be gathered and deported to the island colony recently provided for them. This was quite right, of course; in essence all that it should

be. But warning should have been given, some time allowed, which could have been spent in a campaign of instruction.

These people were intensely conservative, as half-civilized people always are. Never in all history had their lepers been disturbed. Everybody had looked upon the disease as a divine visitation and let it go at that. They naturally couldn't see the slightest reason for this sudden change. Inevitably it would frighten them to the verge of frenzied panic—or beyond that verge.

It was a beastly job from end to end. Jimmy's spirits sank until he began fervently to wish that he had stayed back there in Benguét, conscience or no conscience, out of the whole disgusting mess.

Those spirits of his sank lower still as he approached a house before which stood a four-mule wagon with *Province of Pangasinán* neatly lettered on the sides. In the compound a squad of Constabulary lounged by the heads of its ponies. From within the dwelling came the sound of subdued voices, the stir of feet and occasionally the wail of a very young child.

This house, quite large and very well kept, differed from others in that the spaces between the posts which supported it were filled in with walls of fine basket-work, enclosing a ground-level story which housed a store, the doors of which were now shut and fastened.

Near by was a group of white men, staring sullenly at the upper windows. Jimmy knew them all. Most of them were on the provincial pay-roll. One was O'Shea, his trusted master-mechanic, who detached himself from the group and stepped into the path of the approaching horse.

"Who is it now?" asked Jimmy with assumed indifference and a wag of his head in the direction of the house. "Old Josefa Palanoc?"

"Josefa!" scoffed O'Shea. "It's Chatai, Chief—little Chatai. They found a pimple on her shoulder, them pill-men did. Nothin' more; just a pimple. Ain't you had a pimple or two, one time or 'nother? Ain't I, ain't everybody? Yet they go an' say——"

Again they heard that feeble wail. O'Shea winced visibly and wiped beaded sweat from his forehead. Jimmy looked at him questioningly without speaking.

"Yes, sir," nodded O'Shea. "It's hers—Chatai's. Born half an hour ago. A boy. . . . Say, Chief, whaddaya think doctors amounts to, anyway? Honest, now! Whaddaya b'lieve they reelly knows?"

"It's their job to know," answered Jimmy, carefully choosing his words, "and one of them, Doctor Campbell, knows his job. Doctor Singlay's a stranger to us, of course, but he's high in the Insular Medical Service."

"Mebbe so, sir," nodded the other, obviously unimpressed. "What *I* think about him don't cut no ice. But there's a lotta *hombres* 'round here that's fairly achin' for a chance to spoil that same perfectly good doctor. And it won't be that bunch o' Constabulary that'll hinder 'em, once they get goin'. That's straight talk, Chief. I *know*!"

"So?" snapped Jimmy. "Then get our people together — no alarm; quietly. Just pass the word. Do it now!"

The rasp of command was in his superior's voice; O'Shea became again the efficient sergeant-major, which had been his army rank. Snapping to "attention," he saluted, turned and strode away.

"Where's Padre Felipe?" Jimmy called after him.

"In there, in the house, sir," answered the master-mechanic, pausing. "But what can he do—now?"

Jimmy replied with a wave of his hand. There was no other reply to make. There was nothing to entice him to his empty house, and he would have to go to the beach, anyway, to make sure that everything within his sphere of duty had been attended to in his absence. Better do it now and have it over with. So he gathered up his horse and cantered away.

HE always had loved that smooth stretch of deserted sand, where tiny crabs scuttled, mouse-quick, after each retreating wavelet of the placid China Sea. But it was a deserted stretch no longer now. O'Shea had done his work well, as O'Shea always did.

There stood the mobilization camp, where the lepers were to await a steamer which would come and take them away. Low, temporary buildings of poles and nipa thatch had been erected above high-water mark and surrounded by two fences, with an open space between them, where more constabulary stood on guard, separating a crowd which pressed against the outer barrier from another confined by the inner one.

It was at the inner crowd that Jimmy was looking as he pulled his mount to a walk. Nine hundred and eighteen of them; he got the exact figure from one of his own clerks, temporarily pressed into this service, who sat with pens and tally-sheets by the gate in the outer barrier. Never had he dreamed there could be so many in the province; but nevertheless, to his inexpert eyes, no leprosy was to be seen. He guessed—correctly enough—that the few whom he knew by sight—with skin that shone like white fish-scales, noseless, fingerless figures of nightmare horror—he guessed that they had squatted somewhere in the shade, with apathy mercifully brought by this stage of their awful affliction.

He glanced from the inner crowd to the outer, and could discern no difference between the two. Yet those within were virtually sentenced to imprisonment which would last while they rotted slowly away, until a tardy death released them. That guarded open space parted lovers, men and wives, parents and children who never again would meet.

Jimmy always had thought of these people as beings utterly different from those of his own race. Now he saw men who were sullen, who raved or swaggered in bravado; women who screamed or wept or tried pluckily to smile as they called last farewells to friends. His mind was swept with the conviction that at times like this, when conventions are swept aside, all people are fundamentally the same.

Oh, yes; it was quite all right, of course. Just one of those deplorable things that had to be done. But from the very bottom of his soul Jimmy offered thanks to God that he had not been bred a doctor, but an engineer.

The doctors were coming now. Warned by a murmur from the crowd, Jimmy looked up and saw them riding toward the beach. They were distant as yet, but there was no mistaking them.

Campbell, the Provincial physician, was mounted, as usual, on his punchy little brute of a native stallion, so low that the rider could step aboard by simply flinging one long leg across the saddle. Doctor Singlay rode a horse borrowed from the quartermaster at Dagupan. With them rode the priest, Padre Felipe, easily identified by his cassock. The

wagon, surrounded by Constabulary troopers, followed them.

As they passed the outer barrier, Singlay turned and pulled up his horse beside Jimmy, who nodded without speaking. He disliked this man; hated his thick, crimson lips and tailor's-dummy prettiness; distrusted his voluble self-assurance, which he instinctively felt to be assumed, as a boy whistles when passing at night through a graveyard, in order to disguise some fear.

In order to avoid conversation, Jimmy would not meet the other's eye, but gazed absently away along the road that led to Lingayén. On that road he saw a platoon, armed but not uniformed, approaching in a neat column of squads, with O'Shea, acting as sergeant, in command. This was the Supervisor's emergency force, old soldiers, every one. He was glad they had come.

Jimmy's attention was recalled by a wave-like surge of the crowd at the outer barrier, and a sullen murmur which arose and continued to arise when the movement had ceased. Campbell and the priest had dismounted as the wagon stopped within the inner enclosure.

From under the wagon-tilt appeared old Josefa Palanóc, graceful and stately in her flowing draperies, her face like a tragic mask cast in bronze as she descended to the ground.

An oath burst forth from Singlay so explosively that Jimmy started, then turned his head and glared at the speaker, who went furiously on.

"What's that old woman doing there?" he cried. "Tell that fool Campbell to put her outside, will you?"

Jimmy's silence continued, and so did his glare, which Singlay caught and thereupon bethought himself.

"Those Palanócs aren't Filipinos; they're Peninsular Malays," he sullkily explained. "I knew the bunch in Iloílo last year. I'd have had 'em deported if they hadn't faded away of their own accord. They're trouble-makers, all of 'em!"

"Chatai too?" asked Jimmy.

"All of 'em!" repeated Singlay. "But I'll admit," he added, "that it was a pity. Not her fault, exactly. She's young, you know—susceptible, and that sort of thing. With a jealous husband for that chattering old hag Josefa to carry tales to, you can imagine——"

He finished his speech with a shrug and a knowing smirk that made the younger man long to throttle him. He had entirely missed the contemptuous irony of Jimmy's question. To him it was just an opportunity to tell, in a more or less indirect way, of course, what a fascinating devil he was with the ladies. Not even little Chatai could resist him—so he implied. He, of all men, and at this time of all others!

FOUR Constabulary troopers had dismounted and now, from within the wagon, were lifting down a native cot tented with cheesecloth mosquito-bars. Archie Campbell nervously snatched these flimsy curtains aside. Within lay Chatai. Once more Jimmy offered heartfelt thanks, this time because Lois, his wife, was in Benguét and not there on the beach, where she could see.

Chatai, a child in years according to American standards, yet the wife of Serafio Palanóc, with her sailor husband and Josefa, his mother, originally came from Malaysia to Lingayén, had gone for a while to the southern islands of the Philippine Archipelago, only lately to return. Jimmy and his wife were glad to see them come back. Chatai was rather a pet of theirs.

"Chatai" means Mary. "The Malay madonna," Lois called her and the name was appropriate; it stuck.

But despite the particular style of her undoubted bronze beauty, she was a coquettish little madonna—or had been. Gaily, innocently and instinctively so, with sidewise glances from under long-fringed lids, cast at every living being with whom she came in contact.

Her face was more than ever that of a madonna now. From the storehouse of Jimmy's mind came the image of a painting he once had seen and forgotten until then. It was a picture of that other Mary and her child—one of numberless others, yet different. For the pictured mother's face, as she pressed the sleeping child to her breast, wore the look of brooding despair that he saw on the face of Chatai, and the painted child was no less motionless than the tiny form that Chatai held.

Leaning over the cot, Campbell laid blunt-ended fingers softly on the baby's throat; then shook his head, and with a sort of awkward tenderness tried to unclasp the mother's arms from around it. Feebly but fiercely, Chatai resisted, so he caught her wrist instead, held it for a moment and released it in order to dive into his pocket for a hypodermic case.

"No use," remarked Singlay, producing a cigar and biting off the en. "The kid's dead, and the mother's dying, in spite of anything Campbell can——"

He interrupted himself in order to light the cigar and blow out the match with exhaled smoke. His tone, as casual as though he were speaking of the weather, was not loud; but Chatai's ears, sharpened perhaps by the sting of the needle, caught it nevertheless. Opening her eyes, she saw the speaker, gave a little gasping cry and turned away, sobbing feebly as she clasped the dead child closer still.

"Seems as though I'm not as popular as I used to be," smirked Singlay. "The poet who said that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned' jolly well knew what he was talking about. But it won't be for long, which is the best thing that could happen, and it's lucky that Serafio's away. Say! That steamer can't get here for quite a while yet, so I'll just beat it back to Campbell's quarters for a cup of coffee and a wink of sleep."

He called upon his horse and galloped away. Never before in his life, Jimmy thought, had he felt such loathing for any living thing. But Singlay had gone. There was a little negative comfort in that.

With a word in Campbell's ear, and pushing him gently away, Padre Felipe knelt on the sand beside Chatai's cot, holding a crucifix before her eyes and bending low in order to miss no word that might come faintly from her lips.

Mopping his tired face, so pale that the freckles stood forth in unaccustomed prominence, Archie Campbell strolled toward Jimmy, whose presence he now noted for the first time. There were no greetings. Jimmy said nothing, only looked at his friend. But there was a question in that look, and Archie answered it.

"The bairn has gone—and she's goin' fast, poor child," said he. "It's sad, oh, verra sad! Yet it's best as it is, and that's the saddest thing of all!"

"Then, I suppose," began Jimmy, "there can't be any shadow of doubt that she's really——"

"—a leper?" said Archie, completing the unfinished question. "No; there's no doubt," he continued, in response. "I hoped that there might be, even though I really knew there was not. Then Singlay's diagnosis confirmed mine; and Singlay's a ca-

pable man. Mayhap not congenial in all ways, but——"

He stopped. His eyes, and also Jimmy's, still were resting on the cot and the three figures in and around it. Now they saw Padre Felipe glance once at Chatai's face, then draw the sheet high, so as completely to cover mother and child. For a moment longer he continued to kneel, evidently in prayer; then he rose. Campbell heaved a long sigh.

"He's a good man, yon priest," said he. "I do not hold with his releegion, but he's a good man."

"I, and Lois, too, discovered that a long time ago," was the reply.

"I know," nodded Archie, "and, by the same token, I was near to forgettin' the message he sent. I was to tell you that you looked all in, spent, *gastado;* and that's a true word. His statement that there was no reason for you to hang around here is also true. So he said you were to go to his house, rest and wait until he comes."

For a little Jimmy hesitated. But he knew that the priest's message was more than the mere thoughtfulness so characteristic of Padre Felipe. There would be no trouble at the beach now—not with that platoon of hand-picked fighting men standing at ease directly behind the crowds.

There was nothing to be done that needed his presence; and now that his attention was called to the fact, he realized that he was indeed tired, was pretty well all in. Therefore, with a nod to Archie, he rode away, but paused as he reached the higher ground back of the beach and looked again at the scene he was leaving behind.

He saw that the four Constabulary troopers, directed by Padre Felipe, were carrying the cot and its light burden into one of the smaller buildings, while old Josefa, erect and imposing even at that distance, stood motionless near by, gazing steadily out to sea. Jimmy knew it was not at the nearing steamer that she looked, but at the sail of a práo, red-brown in the waning sunlight, which had appeared to make a tiny notch in the horizon sky.

It was Serafio's práo; of that Jimmy was certain. The sail of one práo was like that of every other to him, but Josefa would know the sail that was bringing home her son. Many a day had she strained her eyes looking for it.

Serafio was necessarily away most of the time in the swift craft that gained him his living. His present voyage was no longer than usual, yet there had been no hint of trouble when his wooden anchor last was weighed in the Gulf of Lingayén. Now he was coming home, all unsuspicious—to this!

That this grim-faced, middle-aged Malay with the insolent manners was a pirate was a moral certainty. There was no proof, of course, but, even so, Jimmy disliked and distrusted this man to whom, nevertheless, his heart now went out in sympathy so keen that it was like pain.

DISGUSTED at what he considered his own weakness, Jimmy handed his horse over to the padre's servants and wearily climbed the rectory steps. At their top he was promptly captured by the housekeeper, who looked like a mummy and talked like a Spanish phonograph.

She took his hat and pistol-belt, scolding him roundly because, as she explained, his wife was not then available for that purpose. She saw to it that he went to bed, and gave him a drink which tasted like the scent of flowers and which, abetted by his fatigue, sent him into a dreamless sleep.

A raucous hoot from the steamer

told Jimmy of its departure; also told him that hours had passed. It ripped away the slumber which had enshrouded him, bringing him to the realization that he was refreshed, that he was hungry and that the night, though motionless, was aglow with the faint light of diamond-bright stars. Also that Basilio, his personal henchman, had been recalled to duty and had brought a fresh suit of evening "whites."

When Jimmy had bathed and dressed, the housekeeper announced that *comida* was ready, and shooed him into the dining-room, where he found his host, whose fine, strong old face was very tired and infinitely sad. Therefore Jimmy forebore to question him, but after a little the good priest spoke of his own accord.

"Fervently I have prayed," said he, "that never again may I witness hopeless misery like that which the steamer took with her, nor that which she left behind with the throng that silently dispersed when her hull began to grow small in the distance. Also that never again may I stand helpless at a homecoming like that of Serafio Palanóc."

Jimmy nodded, but still remained silent. Padre Felipe drank a glass of wine and went on.

There had been no "scene," he said, at that homecoming. Better far, in his opinion, if there had been some emotion openly expressed to act as a safety-valve. But Serafio's rugged face had set like that of a rough-hewn wooden image when his mother began to speak, and thereafter had remained unchanged except to show added lines, like those brought by added years, as the recital progressed.

Chatai had become a Christian. She had been indulged in this as in other desires by her husband and his mother, as they might indulge any other petted child—but the other two retained their ancient faith, whatever that might be. This was why the devoted priest had been forced to stand helplessly by, torn by their grief, yet powerless to console.

"Aren't they Mohammedans?" asked Jimmy. "I thought all Malays were."

"Most of them are," was the reply, "but the Palanócs are of some other belief, though what it is I do not know. They wish to have the funeral held in accordance with one of its customs, however, and I can see no reason to refuse. God help them both! Sorely they need it, and gladly will I do what I can."

"When will it take place?" asked the Supervisor. "And where?"

"In an hour. At the beach; they are preparing for it now," was the reply. "You will be there, Don Jaime? Good! Will you pardon me, then, if I leave you now? I also must prepare."

He rose while speaking, though he had hardly touched his food, and left the room through a doorway which led into the church. Jimmy knew well what the padre's preparation would be; could picture him in imagination as he knelt before the altar, pouring out his soul in a prayer that mercy, comfort and the light of true religion be granted to those unbelievers.

A moment later Jimmy thoughtfully pushed back his own chair. It had occurred to him that he also might have preparations to make; preparations that differed very widely from those of the padre. He hoped that he wouldn't. He didn't believe that he would. But he might. So, donning belt and hat, he left the house.

THE turf-paved streets of the little capital city showed no signs of unrest. The few who passed to and fro were even more quiet, more sul-

len, perhaps, than usual; but that, in the circumstances, could not be wondered at. He saw a native woman spit at Campbell's quarters as she went by them, and by this he inferred that Singlay still was within. The inference was confirmed by Campbell himself, who at that moment emerged. Singlay was asleep. There was no occasion to waken him, and no desire to do so. So Archie fell into step by Jimmy's side, lifting his pith helmet, the only one worn in that region, and mopping his forehead as he did so.

"It's so close that one would think a storm was brewing," remarked Jimmy, "except that there isn't a cloud to be seen."

"No, not seen," was the grave reply, "only felt. For they're clouds of evil thought, begotten by grief and fear. Storm-clouds is what they are, but whether they'll bring forth a tempest or exhaust their force in a single bolt is a thing that I canna tell."

Jimmy was startled. Archie Campbell had left Scotland as a boy, and it was only on rare occasions of deep emotion that a trace of his native "burr" returned to his tongue as it did now. There was a strain of mysticism in his nature, as Jimmy knew, but never before had he heard the self-contained Scot speak like this. So Jimmy laughed, but it wasn't a very convincing laugh, even to himself.

"You talk like Padre Felipe," he said. "The padre claims that thought is the great force that governs us all, and so far, of course, he's right. But he goes farther yet, and maintains that thought can bring into actual existence things that one used to read about in fairy-tales—elves, pixies or what not."

"Padre Felipe is right," Archie nodded. "Thought can bring anything into existence, if it is undiluted wi' doubt. It brought the warld into exeestance, for it is the only creative force in the universe. Yon priest is a lairned man, and his opportunities for observation—look, Jamie! Is that no' him, ahead of us?"

He pointed; Jimmy looked. Hurrying on before them were three forms, identified by their cassocks even in that uncertain light as those of the priest and two acolytes who attended him, hurrying toward the beach.

The two companions quickened their own steps; then Jimmy bethought himself. Archie's gravity had bred uncertainty in his own mind. He remembered that the sleeping Singlay was a guest of the province. An unwelcome guest, it was true, but nevertheless a guest, for whose safety the province, as represented by Jimmy, was responsible within reasonable limits. So he darted aside to the *presidencia*, which is the Filipino version of a city hall, left orders with the police lieutentant on duty, and then rejoined his waiting friend.

Together they hastened along the dark, tree-embowered road that led down to the shore. The sea was like ink with wavering specks of stars in it. The white beach sand shone like half-tarnished silver against which men and things appeared as spaces of blackness, hazy of outline, definite only in shadowy mass.

Then the blackness of one such mass was pricked with the gleam of of a spark, which grew in a second to a blazing torch of oil-soaked fiber. From this torch others were kindled. Both shadows and starlight fled before their ruddy glare. It reached to the distant buildings and barriers, forsaken now that the lepers had gone. It beat fiercely upon a raised platform hastily built at the

water's edge, where the white-haired priest stood in his vestments with the acolytes behind him. It revealed a throng of natives, come to pay their last tribute of respect or drawn by curiosity. It showed O'Shea and his men, still on guard. It reddened the slender hull of Serafio's práo.

Beside the práo her hard-visaged crew was ranged, waist-deep, each man with one hand on her gunwale holding her afloat while with the other hand he gripped a torch. Erect within the craft, Serafio also held a torch. Before him, on a bier covered with yellow silk draperies, lay Chatai and her baby, as though asleep. Erect and still, old Josefa faced them as she stood on the shore.

The práo's two battened sails, both hoisted, flapped gently in the faint offshore breeze. They were the only thing that moved. Never would Jimmy have believed that so many people could remain so motionless, so silent.

The priest raised his arms; the beautiful opening words of the burial service pierced the hush. The padre's voice always had been singularly pure and sweet. Now intoning the promise of a life to come, it seemed to have taken an added quality of understanding sympathy that made it flow like a healing balm. The doctor, standing by Jimmy's side, moved impatiently.

"It's like an angel a-pourin' water of life to hiss on the cinders of hell!" muttered he.

Yes, Jimmy mentally agreed, it was like that, though he himself had been thinking of a vision of *Elaine*, twisted to ghastly distortion by a dream. He noted that Padre Felipe very properly had chosen the service for burial at sea. He thought of the many strange surroundings in which those sonorous Latin words had been spoken and wondered if any had been stranger than these.

"Therefore," intoned the padre's voice, "we commit these bodies to the deep——"

Church Latin is hard to follow when one is not accustomed to hearing Latin as a spoken language, but Jimmy caught those words. Even had he not caught them he would have known when they were uttered. For the torches, except the one which Serafio held, were plunged into the sea. Darkness descended like a tumbling curtain as two men reached over the práo's gunwales and sheeted home her sails. The spars creaked faintly as the breeze strained them. Releasing their hold on her sides, her crew stooped under her outriggers as they passed.

For a moment Serafio stood fast, then lowered his torch to the foot of the bier and slipped overside. The needle-slim craft, swifter by far than any other type that is driven by wind through water, began to gather speed. Her helm had been lashed. A growing light shone in her waist as the bier, which was also a pyre of heavy driftwood, began to kindle. Heaving gently on the low ground swell, as though the ocean were breathing for those two who would breathe no more, the práo passed out to sea, Padre Felipe's voice following until it ended with "Amen."

THERE was a stir among the crowd. For a moment the spell which held it motionless was lifted.

"A 'ship burial'—the auld Norse custom!" sighed Campbell. "Strange indeed to meet it in these latitudes. Still, preemitive maritime peoples wherever found are likely to develop seemilar ways, an' now that it's well over——"

He spoke too soon. Again the crowd became motionless. Again there was silence, except for a single long-drawn note, sung in a thun-

derous bass. It came from Serafio. His mother's clear soprano joined and dominated it. The práo's crew, gathered in a close-standing group behind the two chief mourners, and all facing seaward, joined in a low-toned chorus.

The práo drew away. The fire in her waist grew. The singing grew with it. It was not a song, not a hymn. It was like nothing in the world that Jimmy ever had heard before. A sort of chant, with a measured yet eccentric time unknown to Western music, full of unexpected minor harmonies and sharp grace-notes like the sparks of fireworks.

At times it would come to a sudden stop, always with the same word which Jimmy, of course, did not understand, but which sounded like the echoing clang of rifle-butts on flagstones. After an instant of deathly hush it would recommence with equal suddenness, its weird sweetness raising gooseflesh on Jimmy's scalp, so that he felt as though his hair was on end.

At length, watching the distant práo, he saw the fire blaze high and then die away. The chant also died, in a last wailing chord.

The spell was finally lifted now, though its effects did not end. The crowd drifted away and vanished as though it had become a part of the shadow which concealed its dispersal. Again mopping his freckled brow, Archie departed to make sure that the unwelcome stranger who sojourned beneath his roof lacked nothing for his well-being.

A Scotch conscience, Jimmy reflected, didn't have a thing on one that was bred in New England. Also he discovered, to his surprise, that he was more weary than ever—so weary that his legs felt weak—as he went and gave orders for O'Shea to march the men back and dismiss them. Despite the heaviness which oppressed everyone, he felt that this show of force would not be needed now.

The men swung away in cadenced step. Jimmy paused in order to light a cigarette. The match, as its light flared out, showed Serafio Palanóc, who was walking rapidly by, with his mother beside him and his crew at his heels.

During the funeral Serafio's back had been turned to the shore, but now, for an instant, his face could be seen—and what in blazes was the matter with that face, anyhow? It somehow conveyed an impression like that made by an unfinished drawing—but how? The glimpse was too brief to inform Jimmy. He still was wondering when a hand that was laid on his arm diverted his mind. It was the hand of Padre Felipe.

"Come back to my house," said he. "I have some old brandy, seldom used. I think we need it now, both you and I. Also your friend. . . . But where is he—*el médico provinciál?*"

Jimmy explained where Archie had gone. Padre Felipe nodded understandingly. In thoughtful silence they walked together along the deeply-shadowed road until at length Padre Felipe spoke again.

"He is a gentleman, that friend of yours, and also a good man who has been sorely tried," said he. "As for that other, whose name I cannot recall——"

"Singlay?" suggested Jimmy.

"Singlay, yes. God is his judge, not I. . . . Don Jaime, Serafio loved his foolish little wife deeply and steadfastly, as even the worst Malays sometimes do love. He did not doubt her, or he would have killed her. But he feared, so Josefa told me, that she might become dazzled by this Singlay, whose mind is un-

clean as the bodies of those whom he has deported, and whose diversion is to hunt women, exhibiting their souls as trophies, just as a man might show the heads of animals he has stalked and killed. So Serafio took Chatai away in order that she might no longer be near him. And now we find Singlay here!"

"He was ordered here," said Jimmy. "He had nothing to do with it. It's an unlucky chance, but a chance is all it is. And he's due to report back in Manila to-morrow."

"Most earnestly," said Padre Felipe, "I trust that he may do so."

Another silence fell. They had nearly reached the end of the tree-lined road when Jimmy suddenly sprang aside with an oath that was startled out of him before he could shut it off.

"Forgive me, Padre," he contritely apologized. "My nerves are jumpy to-night, I'm afraid, and that thing got my goat."

"What thing?" asked the priest.

"I don't know; it's too dark to see anything. But it passed between us, or I thought it did. Couldn't you feel it?"

"No," answered Padre Felipe, quickening his step. "What was it like?"

"I couldn't tell. Just something that seemed to brush by, coming from behind. Pure imagination, I suppose, but it gave me the same sort of feeling as I had when that bunch of Malays were singing. Weird singing, that was!"

"It was more than weird," frowned the priest. "It was sinful. Never would I have allowed it had I been warned in time."

"But what was it?" asked Jimmy.

"An invocation. To what gods or devils it was addressed I do not know. But that chant demanded the help of those powers, whatever they were, to the end that Chatai might return as a *chalang* to avenge her wrongs."

Chalang! This was the word that had clanged like rifle-butts as it punctuated that gruesome chant. Jimmy recognized it readily enough, now that it was the only native word in an otherwise Spanish sentence.

Padre Felipe, deeply versed in Eastern folk-lore, had told him about it long before. As *churel* in India, *wulidon* in parts of China and under many other names, belief in this being extended throughout the Orient. It was supposed to be a woman who had died in childbirth and who returned, incarnate but with feet reversed on her ankles, to lure sinful men to destruction.

Well, thought Jimmy, if there really could be such a creature as the *chalang* wandering around, Singlay, he imagined, would be just the man it would pick out for an easy mark. And notwithstanding the fantastic foolishness of this belief, it might be dangerous if Singlay wasn't going away. What better alibi could there be for anyone who intended to do him harm? What easier thing could there be than for somebody to sneak by him—just as that creature, whatever it was, had sneaked by Padre Felipe and Jimmy himself—slip a knife into Singlay's back and escape? Hordes of witnesses would swear, possibly in good faith, that the *chalang* alone was guilty.

"All the same," remarked Jimmy, as they emerged from the road into a starlit street, "I fancy that with Archie Campbell looking after him and that cop on guard at the house door, Singlay 'll be safe enough for the time being."

"That," gravely returned the priest, "I cannot tell. I trust you are right. I think you are. But of this I am sure: whatever befalls, we

will try to do our duty, both you and I, your friend the doctor also, and the rest is in God's hands. . . . Don Jaime, I am no longer as young as I wish I were, and find myself more tired than I knew. Shall we sit here and rest for a little before going on?"

THEY had crossed the plaza. Padre Felipe sank wearily down on one of the stone benches which edged the little park, and Jimmy sat down beside him. This was the heart of the little city, from which stretched radical streets where people passed to and fro as usual, where lighted windows glowed cheerfully, and from behind them came the little sounds of domestic life.

"None can tell what aching hearts are there," sighed the priest, "yet the business of life must go on. Don Jaime, do you——"

He stopped short, started upright as he sat and stared with frowning intentness at the far side of the plaza, where houses were few and people fewer still. Jimmy stared also. He saw a figure dart along the street at a curious, bobbing run, to pause at the opposite corner of the park. In that dim light it had been impossible to tell what manner of form it was. Now it announced itself; it sang:

"Soy de Badajoz
Amor me llame——"

It was the voice of a girl, clear and lilting. A man's voice replied from the distance:

"Toda mi alma
Es en mis ojos."

Jimmy grinned, mildly amused. It was rather a naughty little Spanish love song, as he knew. But this sort of musical hide-and-seek—one singing when poised for flight, the other replying and pursuing—was not uncommon among the local youths and maidens. Coming at this time, it was rather a welcome relief from the tragedy with which the day had been filled.

As she finished her couplet, the girl ran into the nearest one of the radical streets and vanished. It was the man's business to find her if he could; so Jimmy watched. The man appeared, and Jimmy's mild interest turned to sickening disgust. For there was no mistaking that form. An American, if he can be seen at all, is always distinguishable from natives, and there was but one American who would be found at that sort of game.

"Singlay!" he barked.

Singlay ran on, unheeding, into the street where the girl had gone, and out of sight. Then, for the first time Jimmy noted that the old priest was no longer at his side, but was running in pursuit with desperate speed, almost as a young man might run. Jimmy sprinted after him, but Padre Felipe was well into the street before he was overtaken.

"Don't stop!" panted the priest. "Quick—catch him!"

Jimmy did not stop but, as he saw Singlay standing irresolute at the four corners where another street crossed the one down which they had come, he slowed to a dog-trot. No matter what one might think of a man who behaved as Singlay was behaving, one doesn't grab and hold him.

"Oh, Singlay!" called Jimmy once more.

"That you, Varnham?" returned Singlay. "Say, there's a girl who's in here somewhere. Did you see where she——"

"Hark!" cried Jimmy.

They listened. Somewhere in the distance was a confused chorus of shouts and screams. A piercing shriek rose high above the rest and

died away while the babel continued. A man came racing up the street.

"*Juramentado!*" he yelled, and raced on.

"Rot!" sneered Singlay. "Men don't take the madman's vow—the oath to kill and be killed—in Luzon. Say, Varnham, there was a girl——"

The priest panted up before Singlay could finish.

"Come!" he called, as he went by.

A group of men and women, running for their lives, would have passed him, but he stopped them. A flimsy native shed stood beside the street. By Padre Felipe's orders it was lifted bodily and flung into the roadway by men and women together. They ran on. The padre, stooping, scratched a match and lighted the thatch roof. It kindled slowly.

"Rot!" sneered Singlay again. "Say, there was a girl——"

He stopped short with a laugh, for the girl's form, seen more distinctly now, stood for an instant amid the drifting smoke of that wrecked shed, then leaped down on the far side and vanished. With a run, Singlay hurdled the smoldering pile and also vanished.

"After him!"

It was Campbell who called, coming, so far as Jimmy could tell, from nowhere at all. He dove through the veil of smoke as a circus-rider dives through a paper hoop, and Jimmy was with him. On the far side Singlay, whose blind landing had almost thrown him, stumbled forward in chase of the girl who bobbed along some yards ahead. Before he could recover his stride she had gone from sight; Jimmy could not see where.

"Come back!" bellowed Campbell. "Ye donnert fule, come back!"

Singlay hesitated. Campbell grabbed him, too late. The thatch, kindled at last, blazed up with a roar. On each side were fences of closely woven bamboo, full twelve feet high, behind them that flaming barrier and ahead another agonized shriek and a hoarse cry that followed it:

"Amok! Amok!"

All the world knows that cry, though few have heard it. It means, "Kill! Kill!" It is shouted by a frenzied Malay who has become *juramentado*—who has ceremonially taken the mad oath to kill until he himself is killed.

"Amok! Amok!"

Bang! That was a shotgun, fired by some scared policeman, evidently without effect.

"Amok! Amok!"

The cries were nearer and swiftly approaching, but nevertheless quite distant as yet.

"There'll still be a chance—run for yon lane!" shouted Campbell.

He pointed ahead as he spoke to the end of a narrow fenced path that led away from the street at right angles. Whimpering with fright, Singlay dashed toward it; then hesitated and stopped. A group of frantic natives rushing around a bend in the street saw this narrow space and took refuge there, blocking it for an instant as a veil of smoke, drifting lazily forward on an eddy of the gentle breeze, veiled them from sight.

"Amok! Amok!"

"Tak' that!"

The latter was Campbell's shout. A resounding whack followed it. The cries roared almost in Jimmy's ears, yet he could see nothing. Mechanically, and vainly, of course, he snatched off his hat and tried to fan the smoke aside; then the wind lifted it.

There stood Serafio, his naked body covered with oil, foam drooling from his clenched teeth displayed in a maniac grin as he gripped a kris, its

blade, shaped like a waving flame, scattering crimson drops as he brandished it. For a moment he paused, his drug-reddened eyes blinking in the unexpected glare. Jimmy knew now why his face had looked like an unfinished drawing; it was because his eyebrows were shaved. Half-seconds thenceforward began to pass in Jimmy's mind as though each was a minute long.

"Amok! Amok!"

Singlay was standing with open mouth, apparently helpless with fear, as the madman's dripping kris licked out in a lightning-quick thrust. Jimmy saw Archie try to parry it with a stick of bamboo. With a hand that no eye could follow, though to him it seemed heart-breakingly slow as though it moved in a nightmare, Jimmy grasped his pistol, drew and fired from the hip. The greased body winced, yet turned and sprang toward him. Jimmy felt an incongruous gleam of compassion as though he were firing at a mad dog he had known of old. As his pistol spat again, the madman checked, recovered and staggered on.

"Amok! Amok!"

The cry was a choking gurgle now; the drooling foam was tinged with blood. The creature swayed where it stood, hurling the kris with the last ounce of its strength before crumpling limply down, to rise no more. Glancingly, the thrown blade struck Jimmy's forehead, to send him sprawling. He felt the sting of hot blood that ran into his eyes as he scrambled to his feet.

It was hard to realize that only a few seconds had passed, yet it was true. Even yet the burning thatch had not fully caught. Its light shone upon Singlay, lying on the grassy street, looking sightlessly at the jeweled sky. There was no need to ask if he was dead, for his shirt had been torn away, and the wound that a kris will make in a man's breast leaves no room for doubt of that. Archie stood looking down at him.

"I fell asleep," said he. "A woman's voice, singin' beneath the window, wakened me to find that Singlay had gone. You, I, and that fine old priest as well, risked our lives to save him. Yet, look!"

He pointed to a spot, a mere inflamed pustule, on the base of Singlay's bared neck.

"Leprosy?" asked Jimmy aghast.

"Aye," nodded Archie. "Just that."

For a little the two stood silent, Jimmy trying to realize all that this one little spot implied. The fugitives crept from the lane, now that the danger was past and gathered, half timidly still, to look. One man grinned as he saw the hated face of Singlay, and scornfully touched the dead physician's sleeve with a bare toe.

"The unclean body follows toes that it faces," said he, "and goes to pay for its sins."

"Eh?" cried Archie. "What's that?"

Jimmy repeated the words. "It seems to be a sort of prophecy," he explained. "I heard it on my way here, but I'd forgotten it until now."

" 'The unclean body'—Singlay's, of course," said the Scot reflectively, " 'follows the toes that it faces'—by the toes of the *chalang*, who enticed him to his death is clearly meant—'and goes to pay for its sins.' Weel, he's gone. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* An' do ye happen to know, Jimmy, that yer heid is broken? Come along wi' me till I mend it. Then go to bed."

The Story of Wild Darrell

THERE is a glorious old Tudor mansion in Berkshire, England, once the home of the Darrells, but Wild Darrell, the last of the line to hold it, had to sacrifice the place to save his wicked life.

This grim story begins with the awakening at dead of night of the village midwife at a little place some seven miles away from Littlecote Manor.

A masked messenger bade her come at once to a waiting coach to nurse a lady only a short distance away. The midwife was to ask no questions, she was told, and must allow her eyes to be blindfolded until she reached her destination. Her reward for this strange treatment was to be a purse of gold. Torn between fear and greed, the nurse accepted, and the coach set off.

AFTER a long drive through the winter night, the lumbering carriage came to a halt. The blindfolded nurse was led up a great staircase, and when her eyes were freed, found herself in a richly furnished bedroom where lay a masked lady in a huge four-post bed.

The nurse had no idea where she was, but her natural curiosity had made her make such mental notes as she could. She had counted the steps leading to the bedroom, and when she had a chance she snipped off a tiny piece of the tapestry hangings of the bed and hid it in her pocket.

In due course there came a newborn baby into the world. The mystery of the whole affair had cast horror into the nurse's heart, but she gave way when, only a few hours after the child was born, a man masked as all others she had seen came abruptly into the room and, snatching the child from its

mother's arms, brutally killed it and thrust the tiny body in the roaring fire.

THE nurse swooned, and when she came to consciousness she was being carried from a carriage into her own cottage. Before she could recover her wits the carriage was gone.

For a time she was unable to decide whether the whole affair was only a nightmare, or whether she had actually witnessed the ghastly scene which had made such an impression on her memory. But in her hand was a bag of gold, and in her pocket was a fragment of tapestry.

For months she said nothing, fearing vengeance would fall on her. She fell ill, however, and, thinking she was about to die, made full confession.

Suspicion fell on Littlecote Manor and its owner. The nurse was taken there, and after search identified the room and proved her story by matching her fragment with the tapestry of the bed.

Wild Darrell was arrested and brought to trial for the murder of this illegitimate son. He managed to save his life by bribing the judge, who demanded as his price the whole Darrell estate. The ousted squire did not long survive.

Haunted by remorse, he gave himself up to wild debauchery. To escape from the ghost of the murdered babe he would ride wildly across country in the night-time, and on one of these rides the wraith of the child appeared in his path. His horse reared and threw its rider. Next morning Wild Darrell was found where he had fallen, with his neck broken.

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Loyalty

By ALEXANDER WILLIAMS

THERE is no better vantage point for viewing a parade than the top of a Fifth Avenue bus, and yet the young gentleman seated in front of the Old Timer seemed annoyed at the delay.

"Bunk!" he exclaimed as the crowd cheered the passing flags. He was a very superior and elegant young man.

Old Timer viewed him with a cynical eye. He appraised him coldly.

"Loyalty," he remarked to me in a carrying tone, "is one o' the most common attributes o' the human animal. Them that hasn't got it an' can't appreciate it in other people is pretty low reptiles."

The superior young man turned quickly as though to take the Old Timer's remarks to himself, but a quick examination of the aged warrior's wide shoulders, his big vein-knotted hands and the hard knots of muscles working in his jaws seemed to convince the skeptic that nothing personal was meant.

Old Timer's eyes lighted with just a gleam of amusement as the youngster hunched himself around in his seat.

"Yessuh," he resumed, with no change of inflection, "I guess almost the most poisonous reptile I ever knowed didn't have no idea o' loyalty or appreciation o' it when he met up with it. He was a third assistant engineer on the *Monteth*.

"The *Monteth* an' the *Monrath* was sister ships. They was launched in the same yard, within ten minutes o' each other, an' somehow they seemed always to stay together.

"If the *Monteth* arrived at Bordeaux with a cargo o' cement in sacks an' started to unload at Bassens, the *Monrath* would put her nose up the river in two, three days an' start loadin' or unloadin' at the next dock.

"The owners didn't try to fix things so. It just happened like that.

"ONE o' them funny feuds that starts between ships was in full swing between the *Monteth* an' the *Monrath*. All, so they say, because a drunken steward stole a knife from the galley o' the *Monrath*.

"The two ships was a-lyin' side by side. They looked just alike an'

in the dark a guy with a shoot full o' schnapps couldn't tell *Monteth* from *Monrath*, or leastways that's what the *Monteth* men said, so this steward, that wasn't no proper sailor noway or he'd a-knowed his own ship by the feel an' the smell o' her, found his way on board an' off again with a good butcher knife.

"That knife must a cost all o' four bits, an' the boy didn't want it nohow. He was just drunk an' mischievous. The *Monrath's* cook seen the boy goin' over the side with his favorite knife, an' he jumped after him an' clouted him alongside the head.

"They had a nice, messy set-too on the dock in which everybody joined, an' them two ships ceased to be sisters in anythin' but name.

"Every port they come together they started it all over again, although after a while they wasn't hardly anybody left excep' the officers what knowed what it was all about.

"The *Monrath* men called the *Monteth* men Monthieves, an' the *Monteth* men retaliated by callin' them Monrats.

"This here third engineer what I mentioned hailed from Liverpool, an' if the word o' his shipmates could be relied on his parentage was right uncertain.

"He was a mean little hombre, an' like lots o' little men, he was awful cocky. Whenever he picked a fight it was with somebody twice his size, an' when he lost, as he always did, he whined an' crabbed aroun' about it. Every man in his watch was logged durin' a voyage for somethin' or other an' by an' large he was grief an' poison to all hands."

The Old Timer interrupted his narrative to whoop and wave his hat at the parade, much to the annoyance of the supercilious young man who cast a cold and formal glance in his direction.

"It so happened that the ships was berthed side by side in Rotterdam. They was in the Waalhaven an' they was both loadin' with kanite brought down from Germany in canal boats. That stuff is a awful messy cargo, anyway, devilish to stow, an' the mates was most crazy.

"To top it off, here was the crews battlin' every time they got a chance.

"Both crews was right fond of a place called Den Hel, a café which I guess is still there, so what with broken heads an' men in jail both ships was short-handed in no time.

"Now, the third engineer sorta fancied himself as a ladies' man. He was a conceited little monkey an', to make matters worse, he did seem to have a way with the gals.

"Every evenin' he dolled hisself all up, slicked down his hair an' went up to Den Hel. He had a nice little blonde Dutch gal there an', as far as he was concerned, the feud with the other ship was unimportant an' in no way his pidgin.

"MARSEILLES or Vladivostok, gals is all alike, especially them as hangs out in places like Den Hel. One evenin' when the Third arrived, all smiles an' ready for a big night, he finds his blonde perched on the lap o' a big bloke from a French sailin' ship what got in that mornin'.

"They was just three o' the lads from the Monteth in the place an' if it hadn't a-been for them the Third might a-let things stand an' gone on an' got hisself another gal, but bein' as he was a ladies' man he couldn't let them shipmates have the laugh on him; besides, like I told you, he was a cocky little brute.

"He grabbed that gal by the arm an' yanked her off the Frog's lap, upsettin' the table in the process, an' what he said to the Frenchie

would a-scorched his hide if he had understood the half o' it.

"The Frog was one o' them big, slow birds like you find sometimes down in the south; a Basque most likely, an' it took him quite a spell to realize that what was bein' said an' done to him was fightin' business.

"When he did come to his china-blue eyes squinted down till they was no bigger than a couple of peas. He let out a roar like a mad seal an' charged at the Third like he was goin' to rip him apart.

"The Third dodged an' ducked an' got in a sock or two an' everythin' was as nice an' lady-like as you please till one o' the Frenchie's pals stuck out his foot as the Third danced by an' tripped him up.

"At that another one let fly with his boot, just missin' the Third's head an' a half a dozen or so o' 'em piled on that one little Limey.

"Up to this time, the men from the *Monteth* had been only interested spectators, as you might say. It wasn't none o' their funeral if the Third picked a fight over a gal, an', besides, they would kinda enjoyed seein' the nasty little varmint beat up good an' proper at that.

"However, when a whole crowd o' Frenchies started in to beat up a shipmate, that was entirely another matter, so with a whoop an' a roar they joined in.

"The bos'n, which same was a long, rangy lad from the Tennessee mountains when he was at home, hit the strugglin' gang first. A right an' a left knocked a coupla Frogs cock-eyed, an' his two mates right behind him each took a Parley-voo out o' the muss.

"With four o' the *Monteth* men the scrap was a little more even, but somehow or other British an' American seamen ain't popular in most places.

"The café was filled with the scum o' European waters. They all saw a chance to even up things with the *Monteth* men in particular an' Anglo-Saxons in general. In the time it would take you to toss off two fingers o' good liquor every blighter in the dump had his finger in the pie.

"Four *Monteth* men against six or seven Frenchmen in the ordinary course o' human events is just about even odds, but four o' any kind o' men against fourteen or fifteen is plumb unreasonable.

"The Third was very much the worse for wear. When he hit the deck that first time his head come up against the edge o' a cuspidor an' they was a wide an' han'some gash over his eye.

"Bein' little, he missed a lot o' punishment 'cause men in a fracas seem to swing high an' free. Bos'n, seein' that he was most done, took him under his wing, you might say, an' the little fella was doin' the best he could an' incidentally gettin' back his wind dodgin' back and forth under the Tennessee boy's long arms.

"But it was bad. The *Monteth* men was back to back, an' although they was edgin' toward the street it didn't look like they was ever goin' to get there. Some o' the mob what had got a lick o' tough fist was growlin' deep in they throats, an' it was only a matter o' seconds before knives began to come into action.

"Givin' back inch by inch as well as they could an' steerin' for the door like I said, the bos'n takin' the brunt, the two seamen bringin' up the rear an' the Third doin' his little best, 'cause in spite o' his nastiness he was a game rooster, the four made heavy weather.

"The big Basque which had started all o' the fuss was in the fore-

front o' the battle exchangin' wallops with the bos'n. That was somethin' a Madison Square Garden crowd would give their right eye to see.

"They wasn't no serious casualties so far. Outside o' the blood streamin' off the Third's head an' a purple welt on one o' the seamen's cheekbones an' the fact that the bos'n had lost the sleeve o' his best shore-goin' jacket, they looked pretty shipshape.

"It looked as if they might get clear when the gal the Third had got miffy about took a hand. She was crowded with the rest o' the women in a corner. They didn't do nothin' but scream an' yell, but the excitement an' all seemed to go to blondy's head. Maybe she was sort o' sweet on that big Basque guy; anyway, she picked up one o' them stonewear beer-mugs an' let it fly. It caught the bos'n just aft o' the ear an' he took the count.

"That was the signal. In a instant glasses, mugs, chairs an' Lord knows what all was a-flyin'. In the thick o' it the door pops open an' four o' the *Monrath* deck gang took in a eyeful.

" 'Ullo,' says one, "ere's a lark.'

" 'Lousy muck,' says his mate, pickin' up a chair that was handy as he stepped over the Monteth bos'n. It wasn't just clear who he meant, but inasmuch as he wound the chair around the neck o' the large gent from Marseilles, puttin' him out for the night, his remarks was immaterial an' inconsequential.

"Fresh blood is a gran' thing in a gang-fight, an' in less time than it takes to tell it the Rats had the Thieves out o' Den Hel an' they all scuttled aroun' a corner draggin' the bos'n an' the Third, just as the Dutch cops come a-runnin' to be in at the end o' the slaughter. Den Hel recovered in time, but she never looked the same after that night.

" 'S FUNNY thing about sailors. Now here was them boys from the *Monteth*, what a half-hour before would a-told you any *Monrath* man was too bad to feed to the pigs, a-yodelin' down the street arm in arm with their enemies like they had been friends fer years. An' the *Monrath* gang what would a-told you they would let one o' the Thieves rot before they would help him was just as proud as punch over they rescue.

"In fact, it was that spirit which caused all o' the trouble, as they come out into the open dock side in the Waalhaven. The Monraths was all for takin' the Monteths home an' deliverin' them safely. They insisted on this duty so loudly an' so firm it irritated the bos'n whose head was achin' from the beer-mug.

" 'You all is sure very kind an Ah appreciate it,' he tells the Monraths, as he planted hisself like a balky mule, 'but we is perfecly able to git back on boa'd this ship by our own selves. We'll see you all tomorro' an' set you up a drink.'

"Now that was a reasonable speech, wasn't it? But them fool sailormen wasn't content to let well enough alone. They started arguin' an' one word led to another, an' then somebody said somethin' about Thieves an' somebody else must a-mentioned Rats, an', Lord, there was them eight brothers-in-arms, rescuers an' rescued, mixin' it up on the dock right in the shadow o' both their ships.

"Boy, howdy. That shindy looked like it was goin' to put the one up in Den Hel completely in the shade, but it just didn't get a chance to get started good. Two red-hot mates, one from each ship, fell on them luckless seamen like a bolt from the Avengin' Angel.

"They picked men off the pile like monkeys pick bugs from they ba-

bies, an' each man they clouted in the ear an' shoved toward his ship. Instantaneous was the only way to describe the way them buckos cleaned up."

THE PARADE was gone by and the bus proceeding on its way. Old Timer leaned far over the rail for a last look and then settled his coat collar against a coolish breeze that had sprung up.

"Yessuh," he said. "That's what loyalty does for men. Loyalty to a ship or to men o' your own breed, or to an ideal. Them's the things an' the kind o' things men will always fight for. But things like the Third don't never understand such motives proper.

"Next mornin' after the series o' adventures I been a-tellin' you about, the Third stuck his head out o' his room just as the bos'n passed. Bos'n sort o' grinned an' said:

"'Hows' the lady's delight feel this mawnin'?'

"The Third just snarled in his nasty way.

"'Garn,' he says. 'F you blokes had kep' yer ugly fices out o' my affairs larst night, all the bloody mess would a-been avoided.'

"Bos'n stood there a-lookin' at him like he couldn't believe such ingratitude existed in this vale o' tears. Almost like a mother, he was so tender, he picked up the little runt by the scruff o' his neck, dragged 'im out on the deck. His right, like a big meat-cleaver, started way down at his hip an' the Third hit the deck, out cold."

In front of the Old Timer the young man shivered a little under his light overcoat, but that was probably because the breeze was a little sharper.

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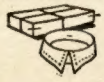

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